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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

Last Blood

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English-language version produced by Studio Proteus for Dark Horse Comics, Inc.

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL Vol. 14: LAST BLOOD
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story
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translation
Dana Lewis & Toren Smith

lettering and retouch
Tomoko Saito

Last Blood

DARK HORSE MANGA™

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Swastika

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the swastika was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The arms of the *swastika*, which point in a clockwise direction, are generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. It is important that readers understand that the swastika has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century [ca. 1782–3]. *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

The Artwork

The creator of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Normally, Westernized manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and re-pasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue

Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the illustrations, we decided to leave those in their original Japanese. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in typical samurai manga and is considered to be one of the features that has made *Blade* such a hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, with some characters speaking in the mannered style of old Japan while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

LAST BLOOD
Part 1

UM...
PARDON ME? I'D LIKE TO BUY SOMETHING TO EAT.
IS THIS ENOUGH...?

.....
.....
.....

SET YER-SELF DOWN.

...? MY TOENAILS ARE SPLIT-TING.
WHAT'S HAPPEN-ING TO ME...?
I DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE...
IT AIN'T MUCH, BUT...
OH... ALL THAT?! THANK YOU!

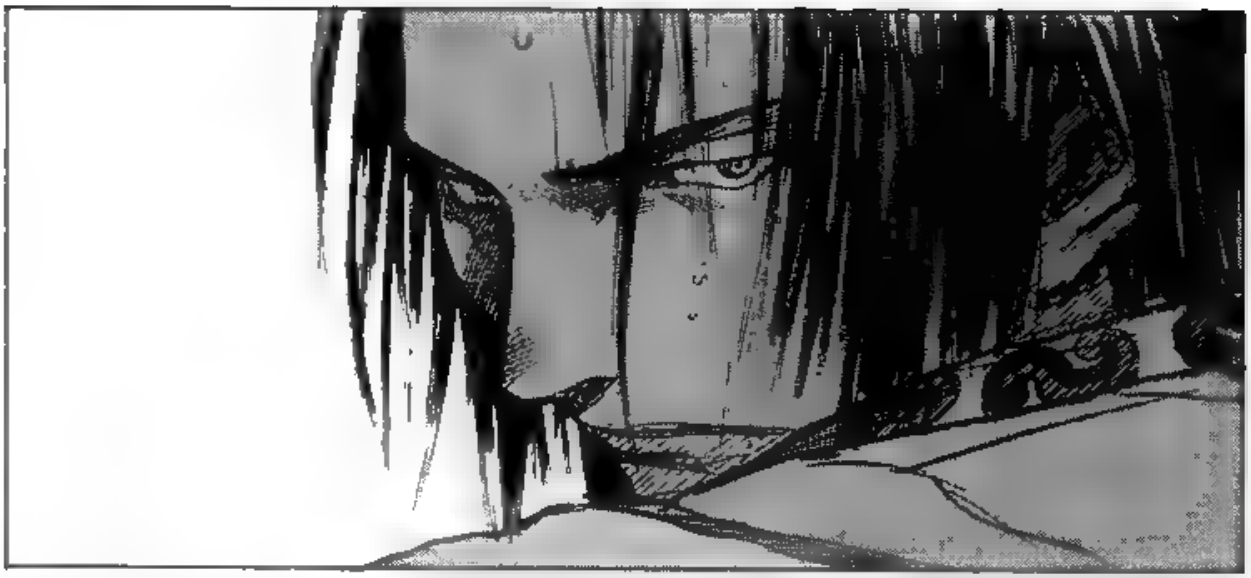
!!
THUD
HEY, MAN. ARE YOU *SURE* THIS IS HER?
SURE I'M SURE. THE KIMONO. THE *HAIR*... JUST LIKE OSAKU SAID. WHICH *MEANS*...

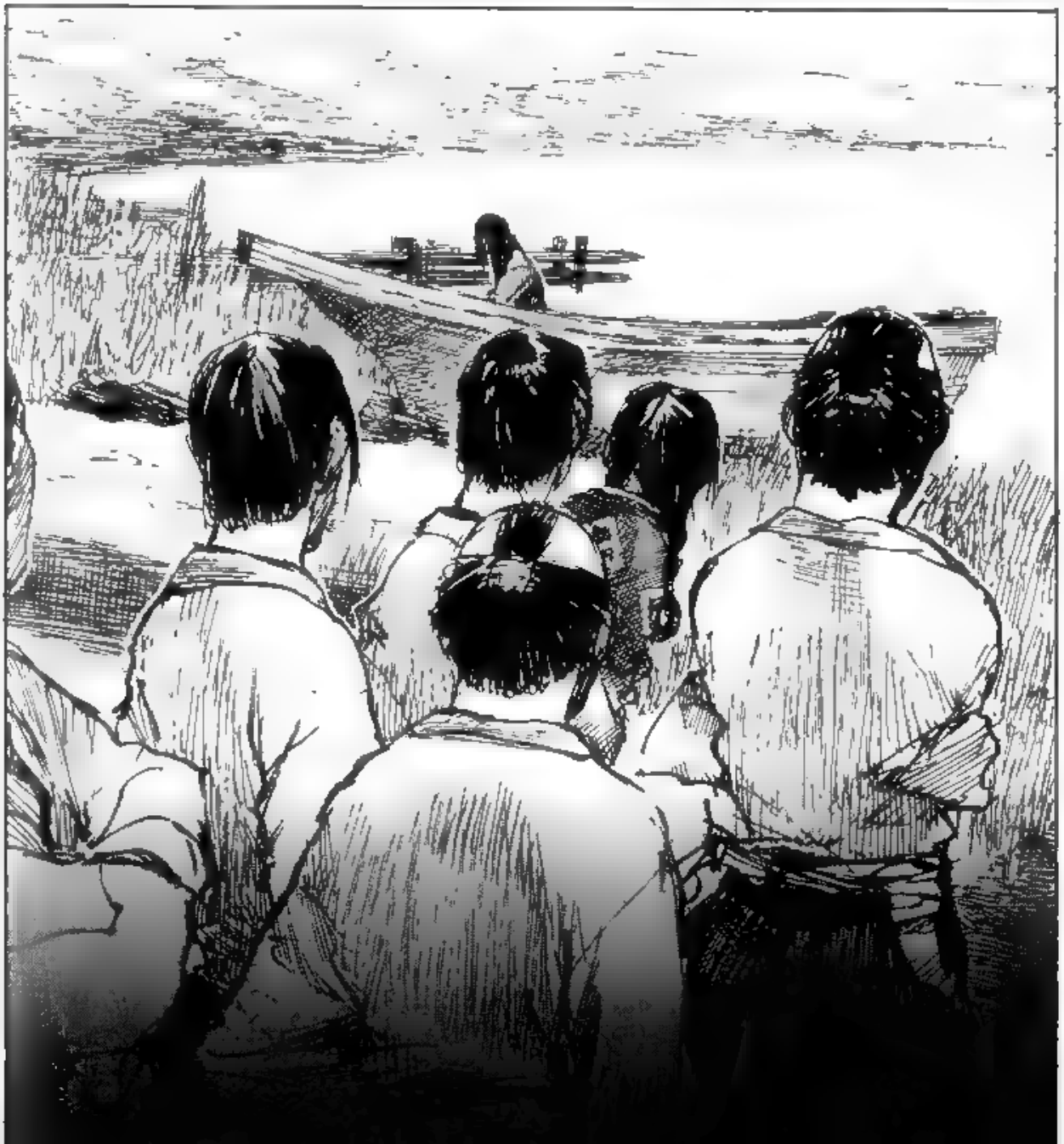
...THE BOSS MAN WHO HACKED UP OUR BUDDIES IS AROUND HERE, TOO.

YO, BITCH! WE GOT SOME STUFF...
...A WHOLE PILE OF STUFF WE WANT TO ASK YOU. BUT FIRST...

...MAYBE YOU WANT TO TAKE US TO ANOTSU KAGEHISA, GIRL?
WHILE YOU CAN STILL WALK!

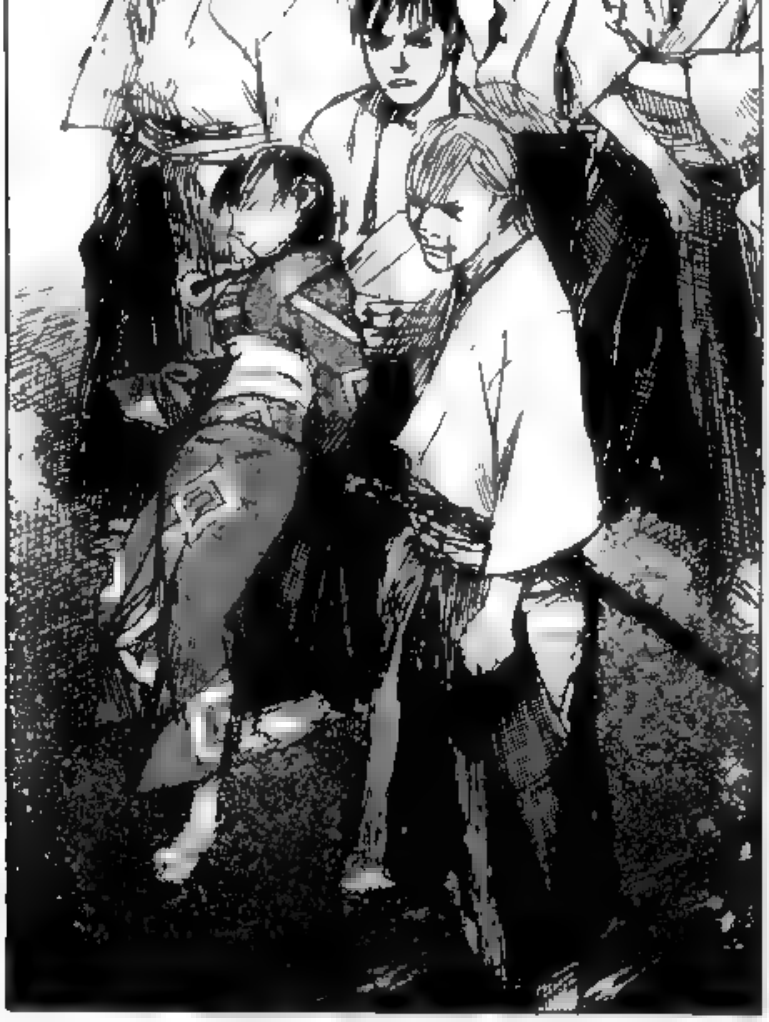
AWOTSU
KAGEHISA!





S...
SORRY...

YES! I KNOW! BUT...
IT JUST SEEMED TOO WEIRD! ME, GETTING HURT FOR YOU?! AND SO...



.....!
A-ANOTSU KAGEHISA...!

S-S-SICK OR NOT...
WHAT *IS* THIS SH-SHIT?!

Y-YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD...

...B-BE OUR *MASTER*? *LOOK* AT YOU! WHAT A F-FRIGGIN' *LOSER!!*

A-ANOTSU...
IF P-POSSIBLE, I WANT TO KNOW *WHY*... WHY THE M-MISTRESS AND THE MASTER...
...HAD TO *D-DIE* LIKE THAT... ..... *NO!*
I *WANTED* TO KNOW!
BUT *N-NOW*, I DON'T *CARE!* NO MATTER WHAT...
...WHAT ANSWER, *WHAT* REASON... I WON'T LET Y-YOU OFF *ALIVE*.
YOU, I *KILL!* TAKE UP YOUR *SWORD!*

.....
.....
YOU'RE IDIOTS...!
EVERY STUPID ONE OF YOU... ALL CRAZY!

CAN'T YOU SEE, DAMN IT?! HE'S NOT A KENSHI ANY MORE!
HE'S JUST A DYING MAN!
THERE'S A RIGHT WAY TO KILL, ISN'T THERE?!
YOU'RE DISGUSTING! GANGING UP ON SOME SICK GUY!!
ANOTSU KAGEHISA!
YOU, TOO, YOU PSYCHO!
YOU'RE A STUMBLING WRECK!
STOP SMIRKING LIKE YOU CAN DO EVERYTHING YOURSELF!
WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!

SH-SHUT HER UP!
JUST COMMIT HARA-KIRI AND--
Y-YES... ACCEPT YOUR F-FATE. AMOTSU KASE-HISA!
WHAT THE HELL ?
HEY...?!
HEY, RIN!!

.....
.....
.....?
M...
MANJI...?

.....
.....!
HEY, YOU! STOP RIGHT THERE!
HUH? WHO THE HELL'S THAT?

.....
MA...
.....
.....
sniff

MANJI...
.....
MANJI..

MANJI!! LISTEN!! KILL EVERY-ONE!!
DO IT NOW!!
?!
HUH...?!
WHAT TH--?!

SHUT UP, YA STUPID BITCH!
SLICE THEM! BUTCHER THEM!!
YOU IDIOTS! CONTROL HER!
AW, SHIT!
DON'T TELL ME... ITTŌ-RYŪ?

WHY AM I SCREAMING THESE THINGS? I DON'T UNDER-STAND...
IF MANJI..
IF ANYONE HERE.
...FINALLY KILLED THAT MAN
MY JOURNEY WOULD BE OVER AT LAST
I KNOW THAT. AND YET.
SAY SOME-THING, YOU ASSHOLE!
HEY, YOU! ANSWER ME!

WELL, SHIT, RIN.
I FINALLY TRACK YOU DOWN, AND NOW WHAT? FRIGGIN' WEIRD TWIST, GIRL!
SO... I GOT JUST ONE QUESTION.
ARE THESE CLOWNS ITTŌ-RYŪ?
EH...?
UM... .....

I...
I DON'T... THINK SO.
GOT IT.
RIN... SORRY, KID.
I MADE A GRAVESIDE PROMISE, TOO.
I CAN HELP YOU GET REVENGE, BUT I CAN'T JUST CHOP UP EVERY DUMBASS...
...THAT CROSSES YOUR PATH.
SO I NEED TO KNOW-- ARE THESE GUYS EVIL MEN THAT I SHOULD KILL?
THIS TIME, RIGHT NOW, I'LL TRUST YOUR JUDGE-MENT.
.....
.....
M... MANJI... I...

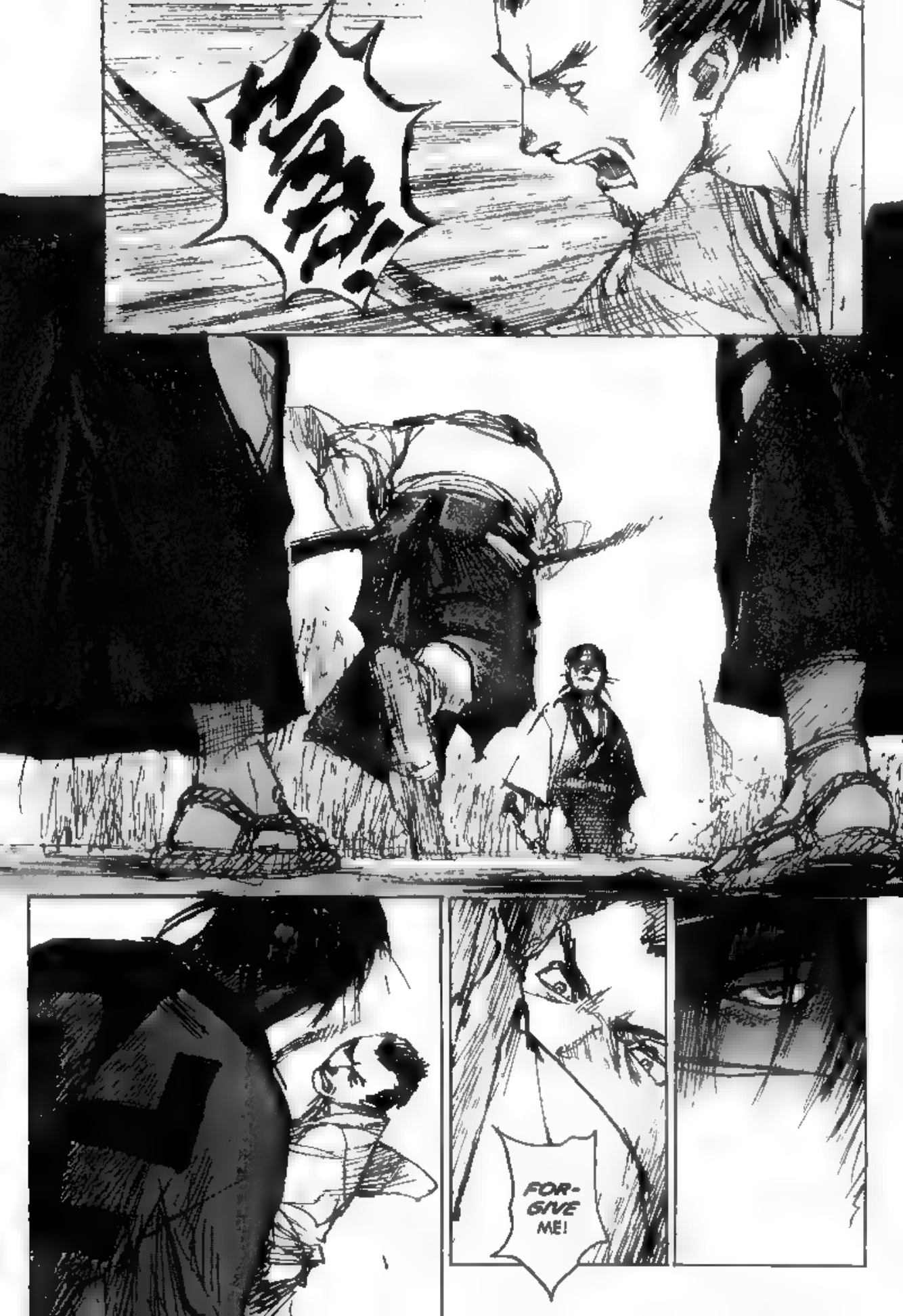
HE ISN'T ITTŌ-RYŪ...?
WHAT'S GOING ON?
.....
.....
AH...
.....
.....
I...
I...
.....
.....

WHAT SHOULD I DO..?
I WASN'T EVEN THINK-ING...
WHO'S THE VICTIM .?
WHO IS IT...
...THAT MOST DESERVES TO DIE?
WELL, RIN?! WHICH IS IT?!
.....
.....

I... I DON'T KNOW...
I JUST DON'T KNOW!
I... I'M SUCH A LITTLE FOOL!
I'LL MAKE SOME... AWFUL DECI-SION...!
SO...
...THIS IS ALL I KNOW.
IF YOU DON'T KILL THESE MEN... THEN LATER, ABSOLUTE-LY...
...THEY WILL KILL ME!

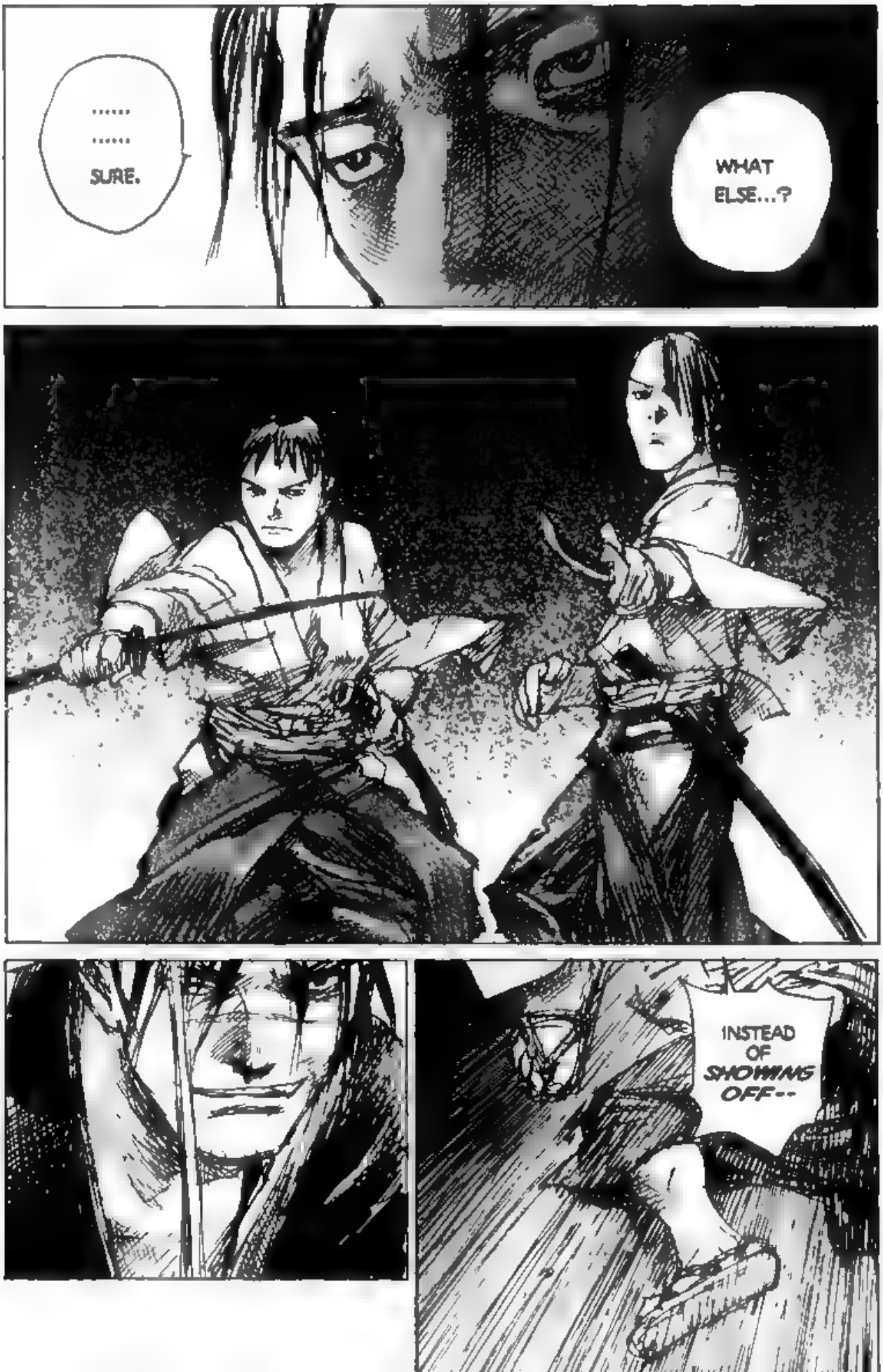
!!
HEH HEH...
DAMN... WON'T YOU EVER GROW UP?
"SOB, CRY, BOO-HOO-HOO!"

MAKING EVERYTHING SO COMPLI-CATED.
ALL I NEEDED TO KNOW, GIRL...
...WAS THAT ONE SIMPLE FACT.


FOR-
GIVE
ME!

HEH, HEH..
HEY, BOYS...
YA GOT SOME NERVE, HURTIN' MY WOMAN.
GONNA FRIGGIN' KILL YOU ALL!

MANJI! OH! MANJI!
UH... KOZUE.
DON'T THINK I GOTTA REMIND YOU.
WE'RE NOT BABY-SITTERS, MAN.
ENEMY, RANDOM GUY, WHAT-EVER.
IS IT COOL IF...
...WE CUT HIM DOWN?!

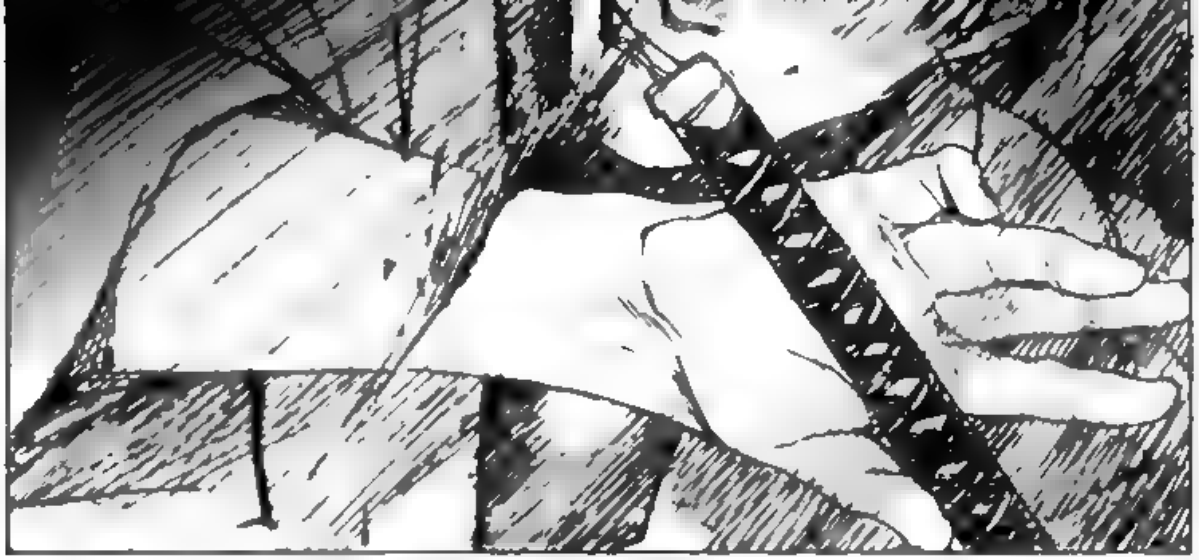

.....
.....
SURE.
WHAT ELSE...?
INSTEAD OF SHOWING OFF--

--BETTER MOVE OR YOU'RE DEAD MEAT!

KANG
KNG...?

SHING
SHING

DIE...
!?



?!?
HUH...?!

SHIT...!

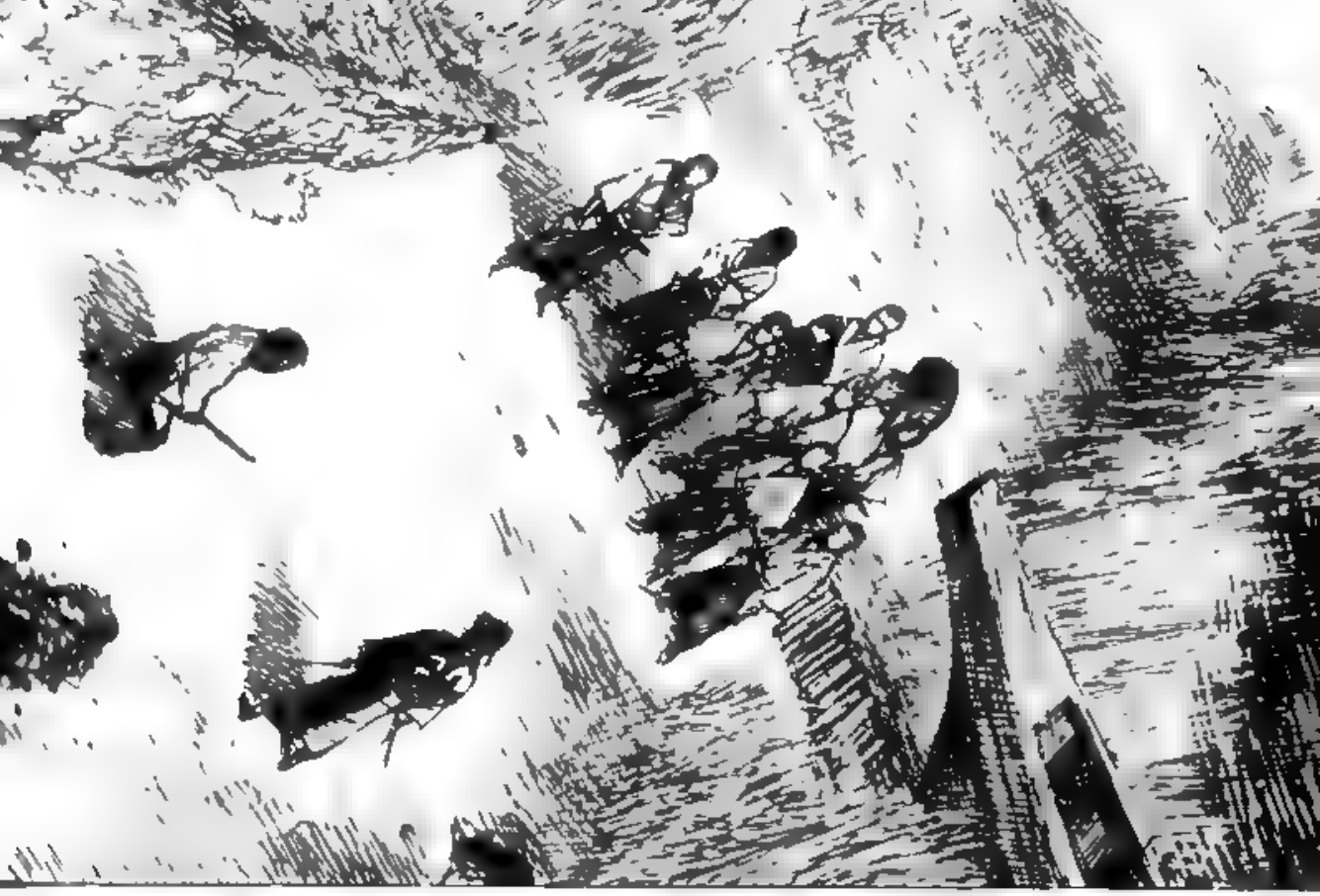
BUT, TOMO!
STAY BACK, GUYS!
DON'T FORGET THAT THE GUY YOU HAVE TO KILL IS...
NO!! IF TWO OF US CAN'T TAKE HIM, DAMMIT...
...HOW CAN WE FACE THE MASTER WHEN WE DIE?!

...THAT MAN!
ANOTSU KAGEHISA !!

!!
WHAT THE--?!

LAST BLOOD
Part 2

DID YOU SAY...
...“ANOTSU KAGEHISA” ...?!
.....
.....



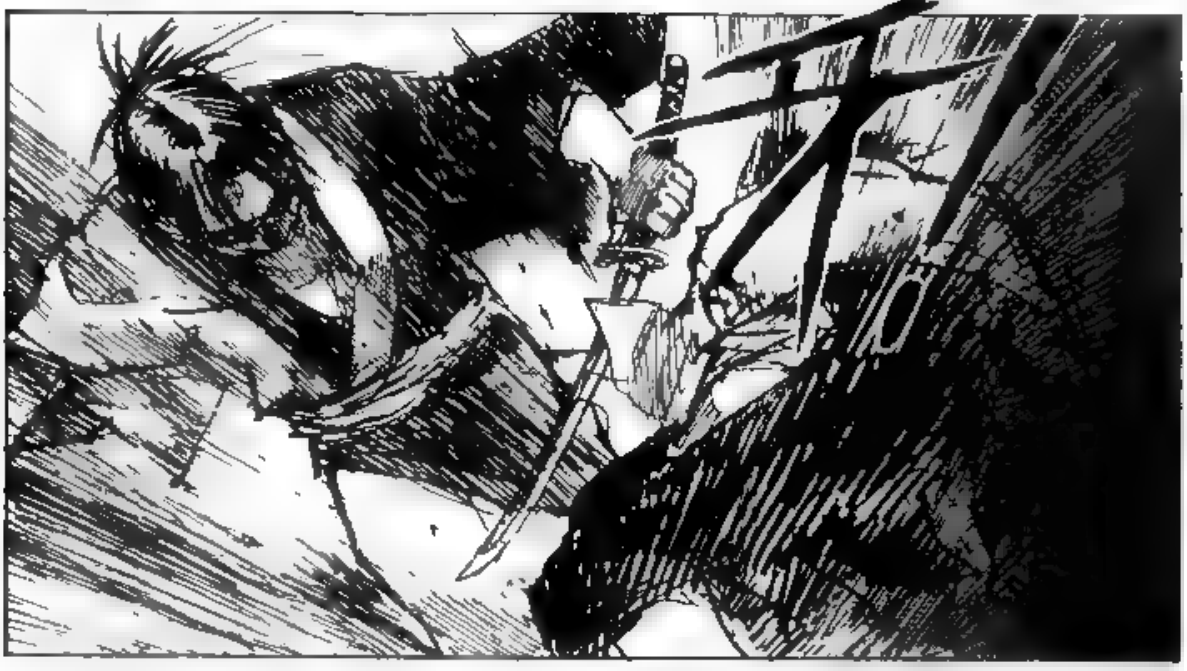
BUT... WHICH *ONE*?

NAW... *OBVIOUS*, AIN'T IT? THESE ARE THE *DŌJŌ* GUYS...
...THAT SHINGYŌTŌ-*RYŪ* BUNCH.

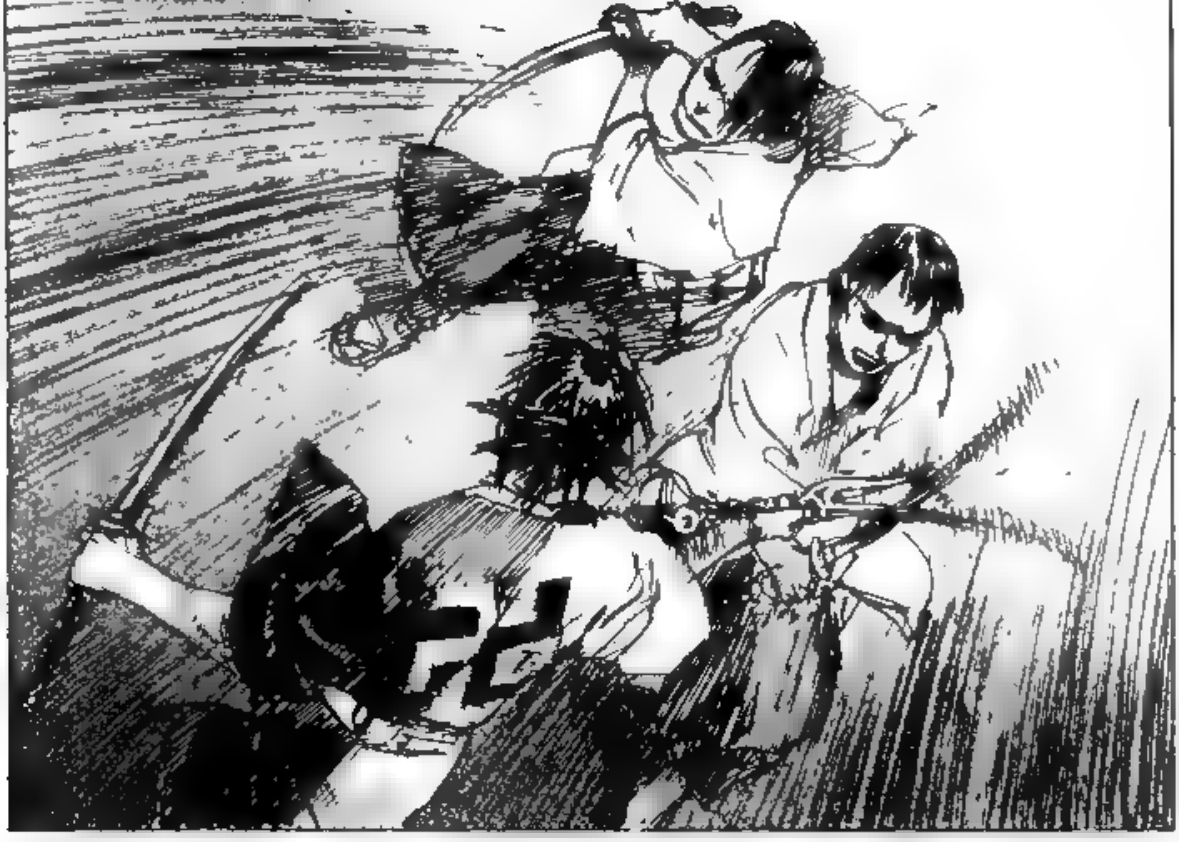
WEARING THOSE WIMPY *HAKAMA*...
BUNCH OF LOSERS...

ALL
BUT
ONE!

MANJI
!



GET
LOST,
PUNK!



CHK

WHOA...!
WOP
WOP

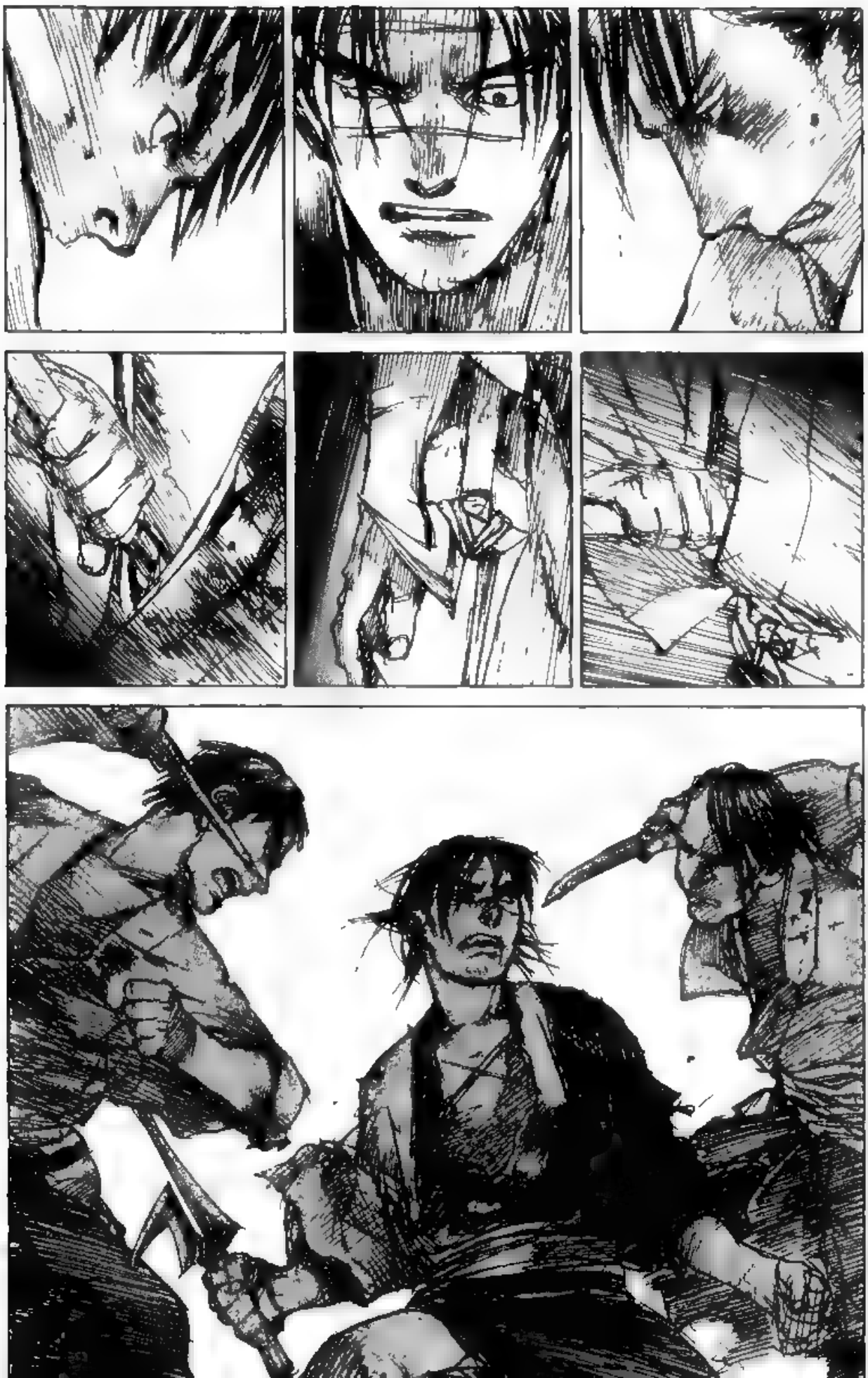
HUH?! AGAIN ?!
WAIT A SEC... NOW I GET IT.
THESE GUYS AREN'T WILLING TO DIE TO KILL ME!
GREAT. WHAT A TOTAL SCREW-UP. ANOTSU RIGHT UNDER MY NOSE, AND...
...I PICK A FIGHT WITH THE CLOWNS CHASING HIM!

AND EVEN WORSE...
...THEY'RE PRETTY DAMN GOOD.

HMM... HOW MANY OF THEM ARE THERE...?
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THEY'LL GIVE UP EASY.

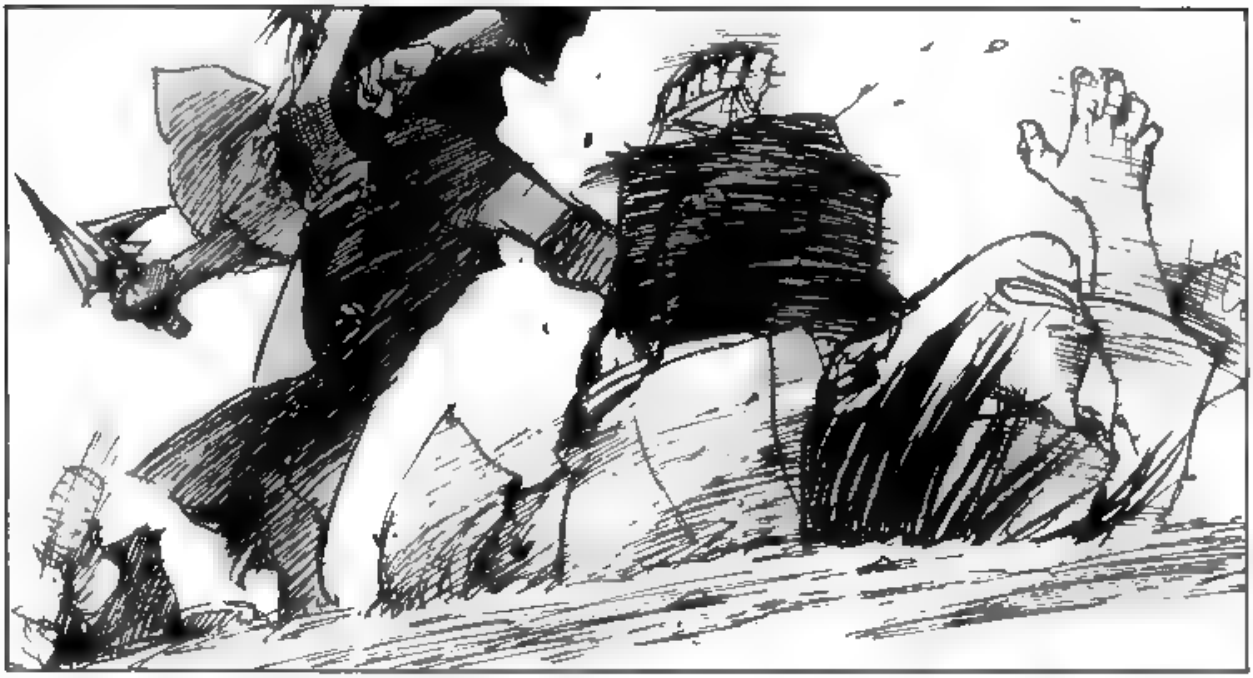
.....
.....

RAH!
NOW !!
SHRIEK

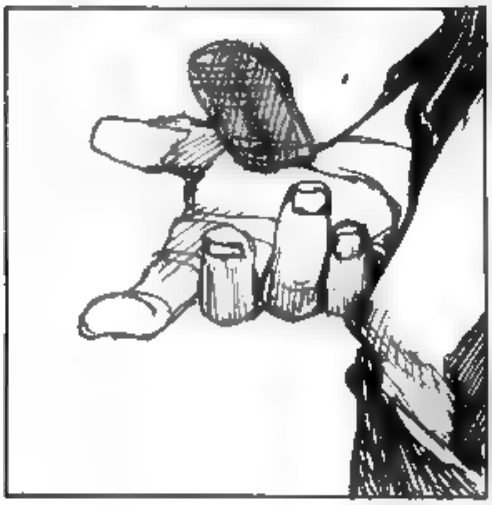


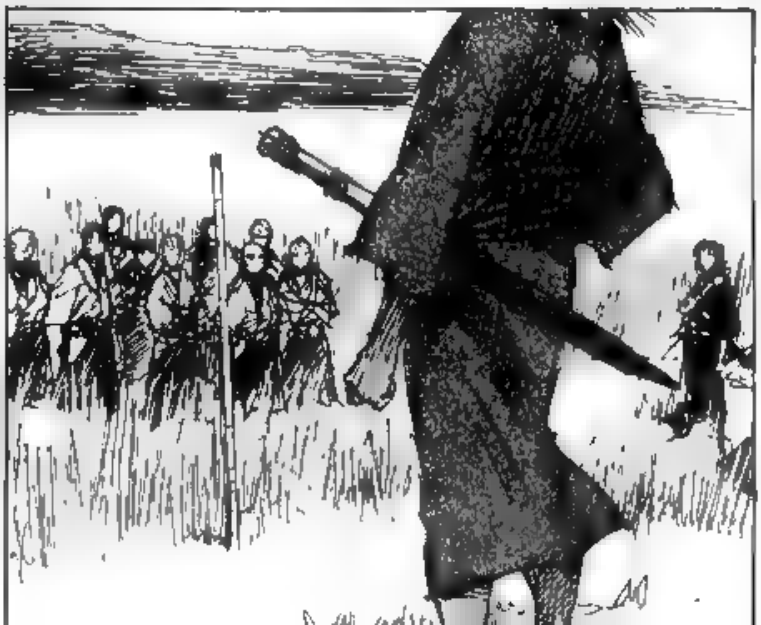
?!
NOW FOR...
...THE FINISH!

ぎゃ!
ひゅ
ぎゃ!



WHAT
TH--?!
!!



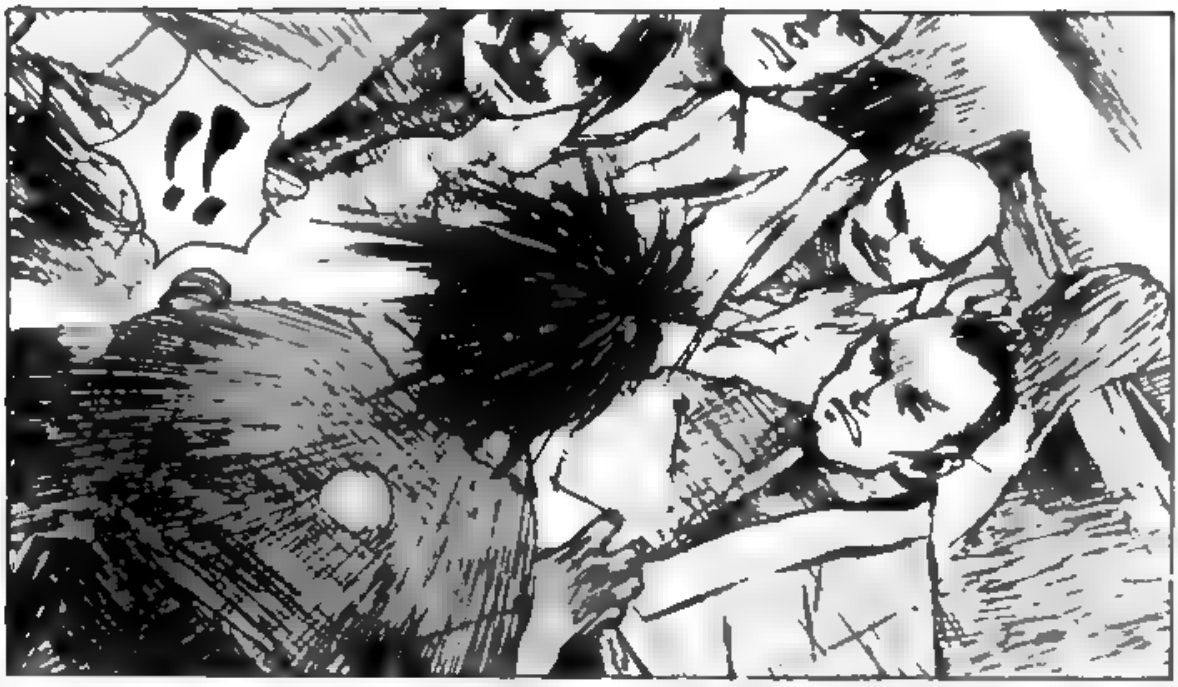


YO, MANJI!!! CHANGE FROM THE DOC!
LOOKS LIKE YOU COULD USE IT.
EH...? ISN'T THAT--?
.....
.....
GEEZ... IS THIS A JOKE?

TALK ABOUT YOUR WORST CASE SCENARIO!
NOW THE ITTŌ-RYŪ SHOWS UP... WHAT A NIGHTMARE!
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!
YEAH! THIS AIN'T NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!
MAGATSU TAITO, ITTŌ-RYŪ.
DID YOU SAY...
..."ITTŌ-RYŪ"...?!

...UH...
ER...
OH, SHIT.
MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID THAT...
A-ANOTSU KAGEHISA!
C-CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE!
ENOUGH W-WITH THESE INTERFERING OUTSIDERS!

ITTŌ-RYŪ? SHINGYŌTŌ-RYŪ?! I D-DON'T CARE!
IT'S YOUR LIFE I WANT!
I'M FINISHING THIS N-NOW! ANOTSU KAGEHISA!
HUH...?!
HEY! WAIT A—

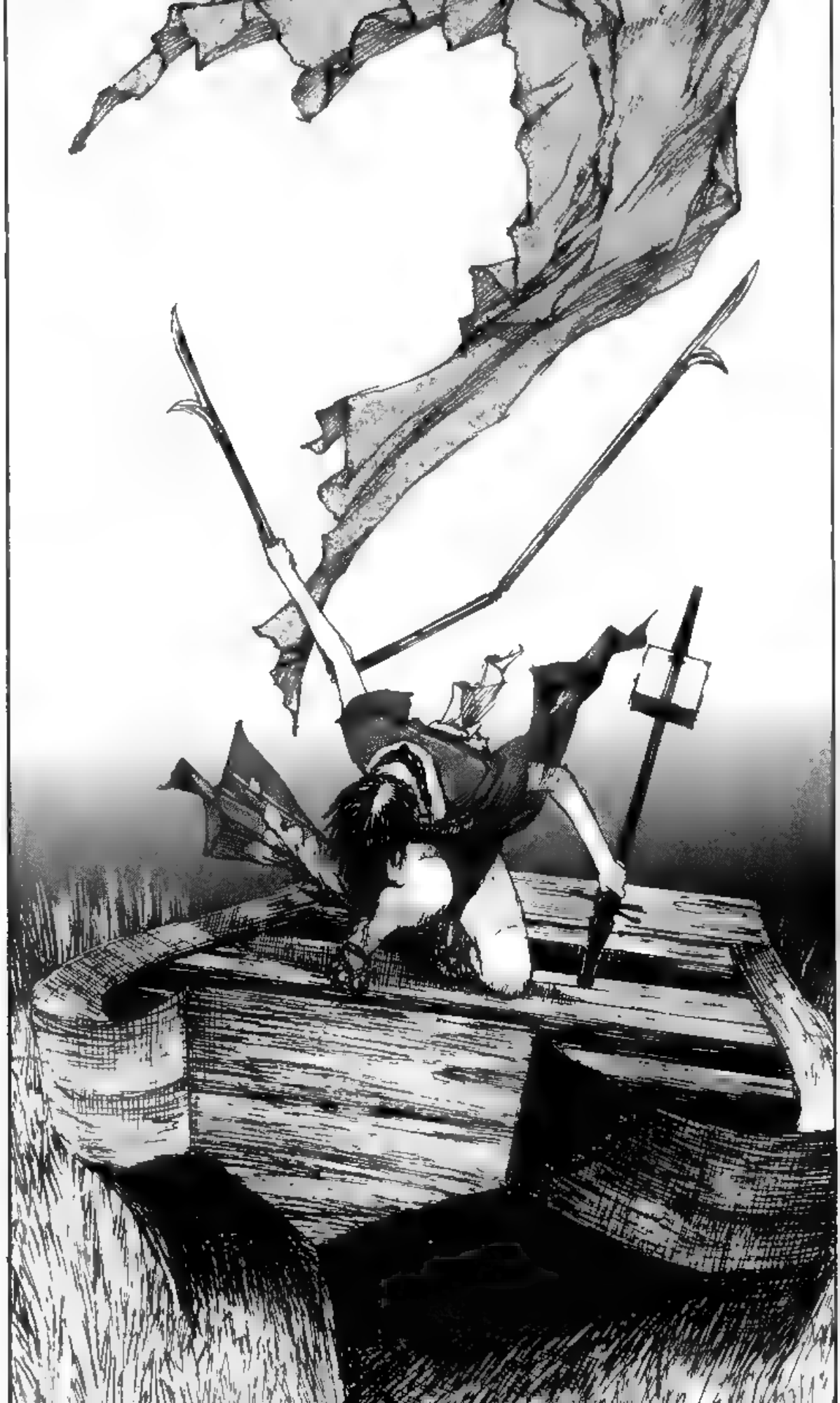

!!

WHY, YOU--

BOSS...
!!

AH...?!
WH-
WHAT?!
HOW...?!

.....
.....
.....!



LAST BLOOD
Part 3

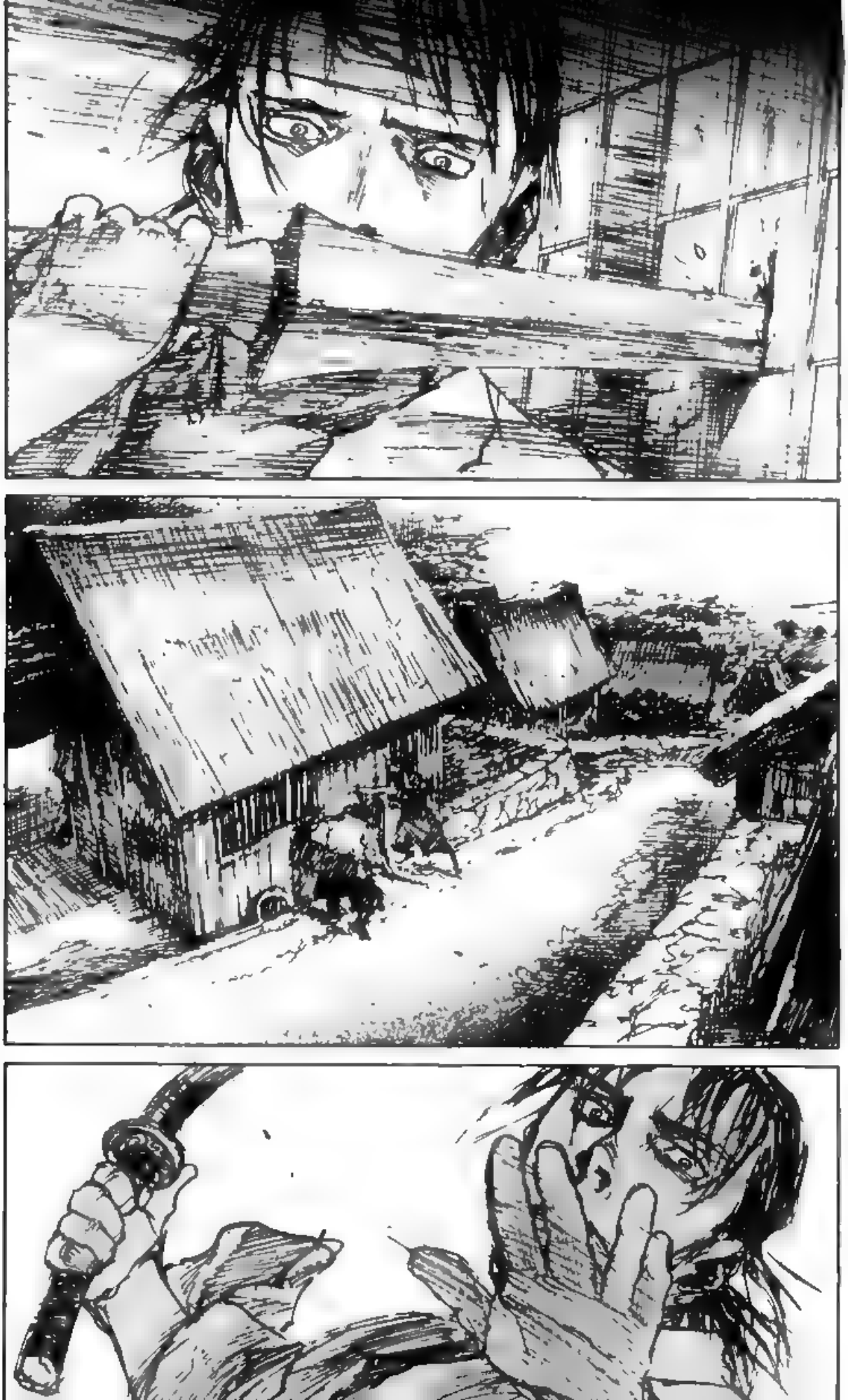
HEY, TONO... WHERE'D HE GO?
PROBABLY... UP THAT... SLOPE...!
SO, TONO... AFTER THAT BROAD SHOWS UP...
...OLD ONE-EYE TURNS AND RUNS LIKE HELL... RIGHT?
BEEN THINK-ING... CHASING HIM MIGHT NOT BE SMART.

MAYBE HE WAS PLANNING TO SCATTER US...
...RIGHT FROM THE START?
SO WHAT? WE GOT OUR JOB TO DO!
MAYBE HE WAS. MAYBE NOT.
BUT...
I DUNNO... MAYBE IT'S SMARTER TO REGROUP?
FWAP
DAMMIT, TAKI! GO BACK NOW...?!
AFTER THAT PATHETIC FIGHT?!
HOW'LL YOU EXPLAIN IT AT THE MASTER'S GRAVE?

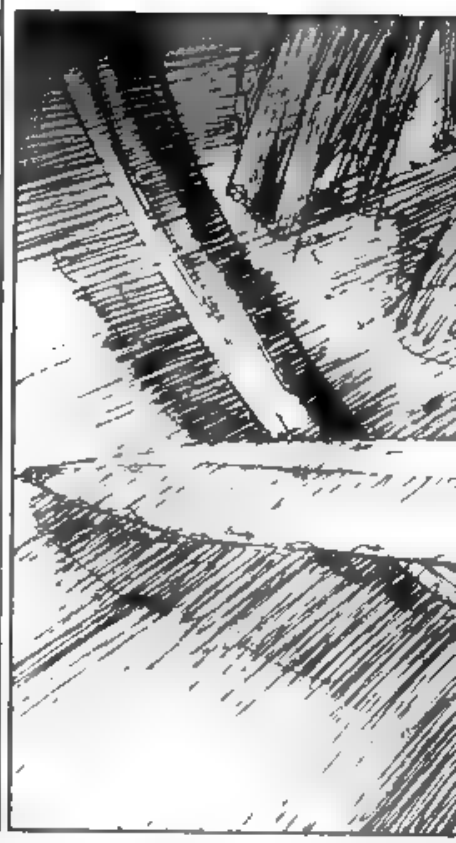
HOH...
.....
I LOVE IT.

YOU GUYS ARE TOO FRIGGIN' SERIOUS TO BE REAL.
LOOK... THIS ANOTSU KAGEHISA. HE'S SORTA OF MY ENEMY, TOO, SEE?
WHOA! HEAR ME OUT!
NOW, IT'S UP TO YOU, BUT WHY DON'T WE HOOK UP...
...AND TAKE HIM ON TO-GETHER?

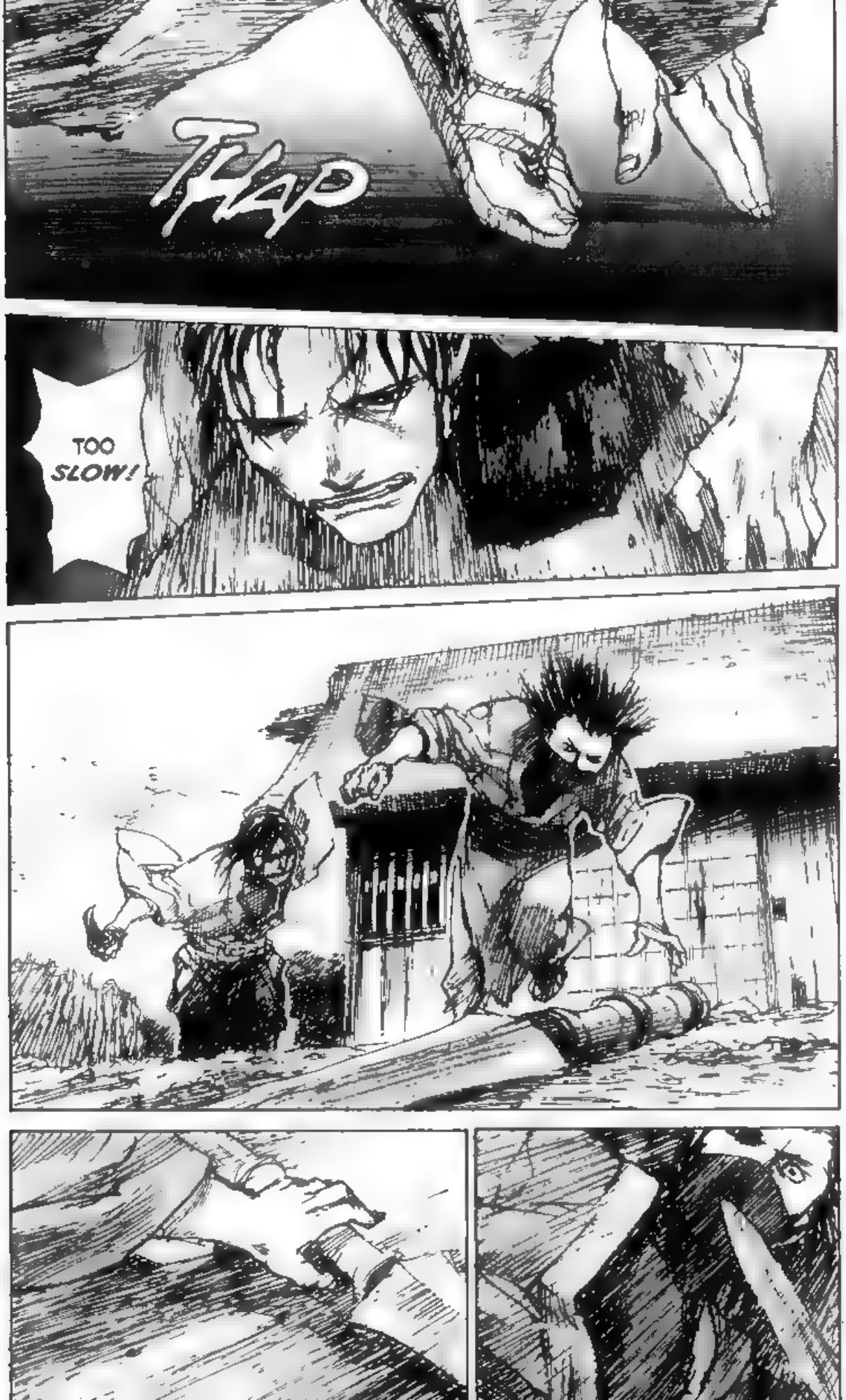
TRUST THE WORD OF A MAN WE JUST MET?! NOT A CHANCE!
AND SO WHAT IF HE LEADS THE ITTŌ-RYŪ?! IF A DOZEN OF US CAN'T TAKE HIM...
...THE SHINGYŌTŌ-RYŪ'S NAME WILL BE DESTROYED FOREVER!
PLUS WE WILL NEVER...
...NEVER FORGIVE ANYONE WHO HURTS OUR COMRADES! SO! THREE REASONS TO SAY NO!
WELL... GUESS THAT'S IT, THEN.



YANG
SHEF
CHUKK

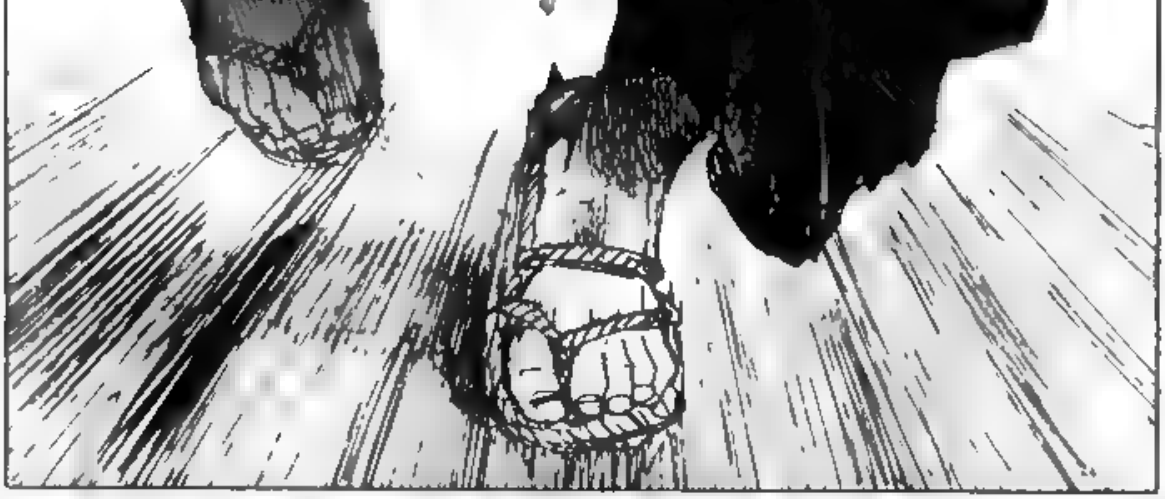


SHINOBU


HAP
TOO SLOW!

HEH
HEH
HEH...
SO...
THE
ITTŌ-RYŪ!
NO WORSE...
AND NO
BETTER
THAN THEY
SAY.
YEAH?
WELL, YOU
GUYS ARE
A BIT
TOUGH TO
SWALLOW...
...AT
LEAST,
FOR A GUY
IN MY
CONDITION!

huuh
huff
RUN!



KANG
AH--?!

WHY YOU--
?!

HAIEE...

HUH?!
ABOVE YOU, IDIOT!

HOW TH--
FUHH

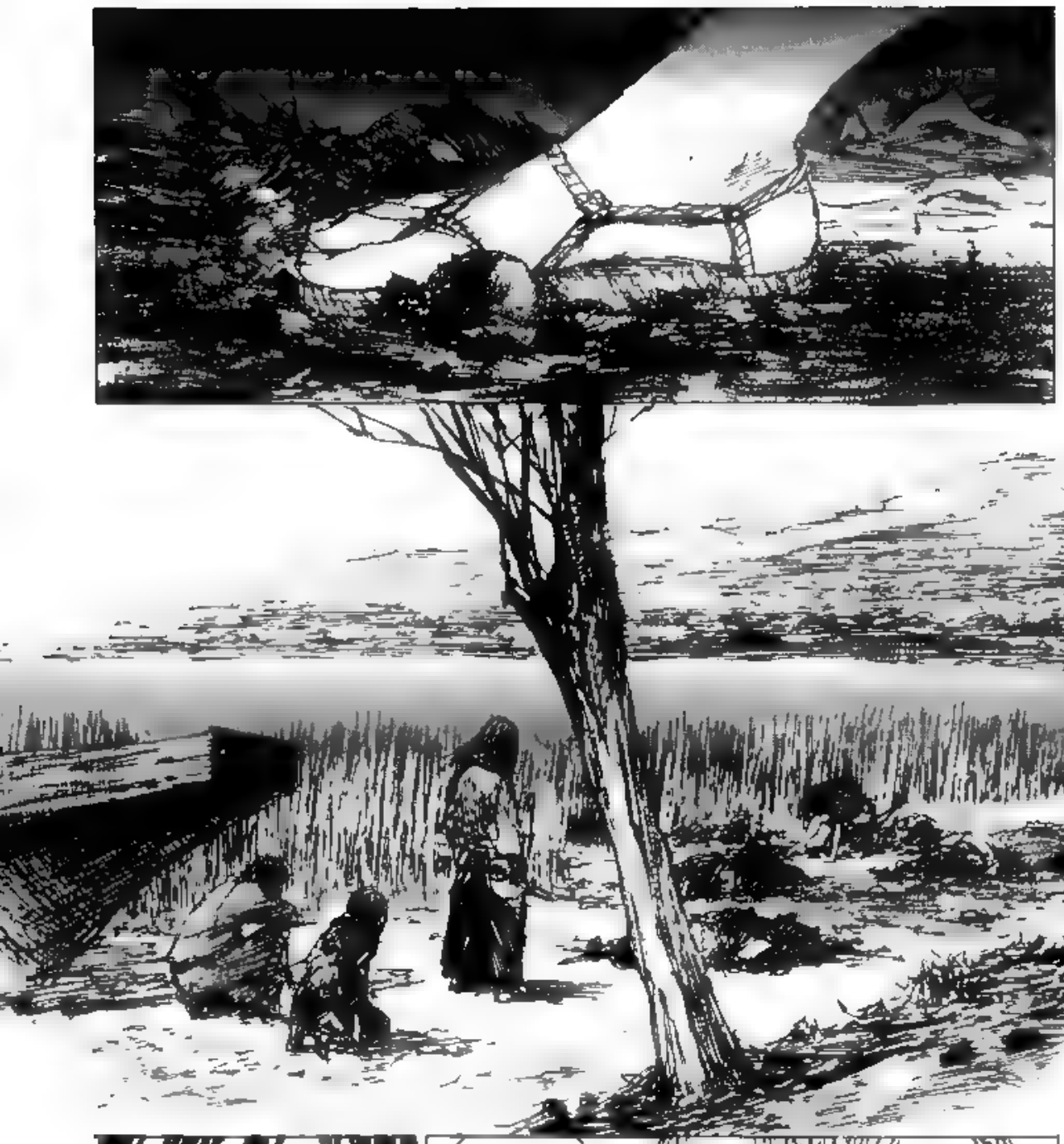
!!
ONG...
CHCK

W...
WATCH...
S.
SEE.
WHAT
I.
I.
CAN
NEVER
.....
...WILL
NEVER
BE.

CHANGING
BEFORE
ME.

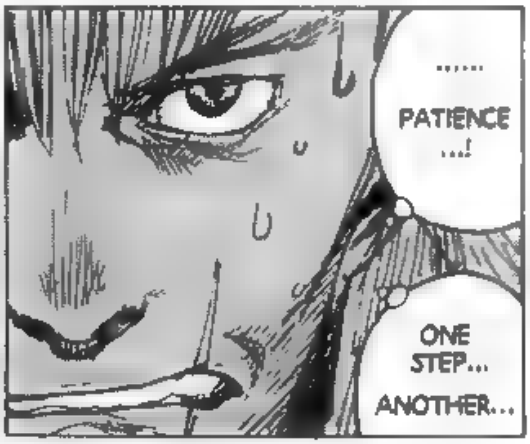
WHEN I WAS A CHILD, AFRAID OF A SINGLE WILD DOG...
...AND THAT GIRL APPEARED, NO MORE THAN TEN, SLICING IT IN HALF... THE SAME FEELING.
ONLY NOW, REMEMBERING MY EMOTION... IT WASN'T FEAR OF HER. NO...
I ALREADY KNEW... INSTINCTIVELY... THAT SHE'D WALK AHEAD OF ME THE REST OF MY LIFE.
ACCEPTING THAT, I FELT NO SHAME. NO RESISTANCE. ONLY FAMILIAR, COMFORTABLE DESPAIR.
I REMEMBER IT NOW... WHAT I FELT THEN...

IT WAS
AWE.



THAT LEAVES JUST...
...YOU, SIR.

.....
HOLY...
DAMMIT...! ALL THAT KILLING...
...AND NOT A SINGLE BLOOD STAIN... HOW DOES SHE MOVE LIKE THAT?!
.....
.....


.....
PATIENCE ...!
ONE STEP...
ANOTHER...

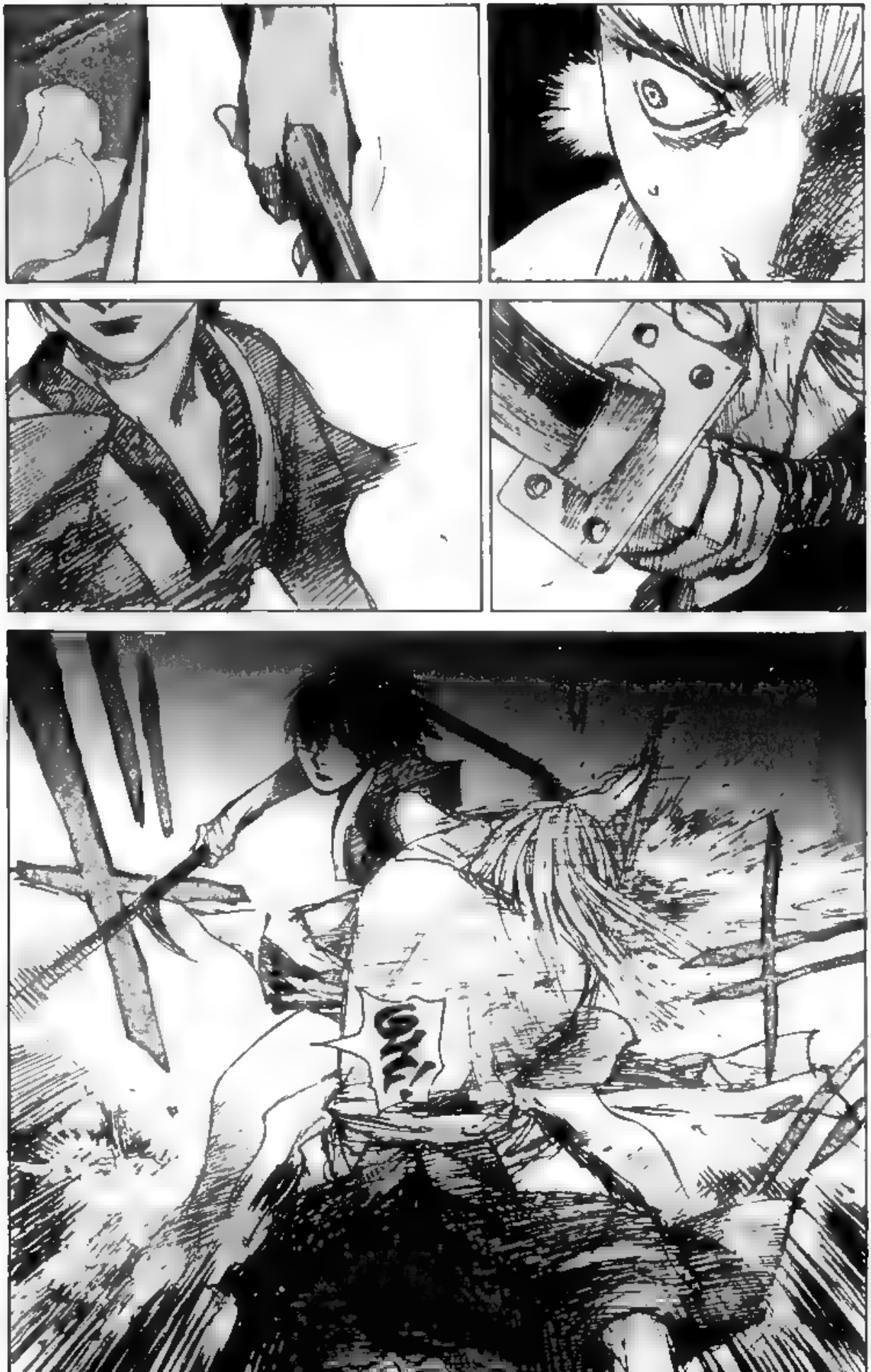
STEP BY STEP, CLOSE ON HER.
UNTIL THE INSTANT BEFORE SHE STRIKES!

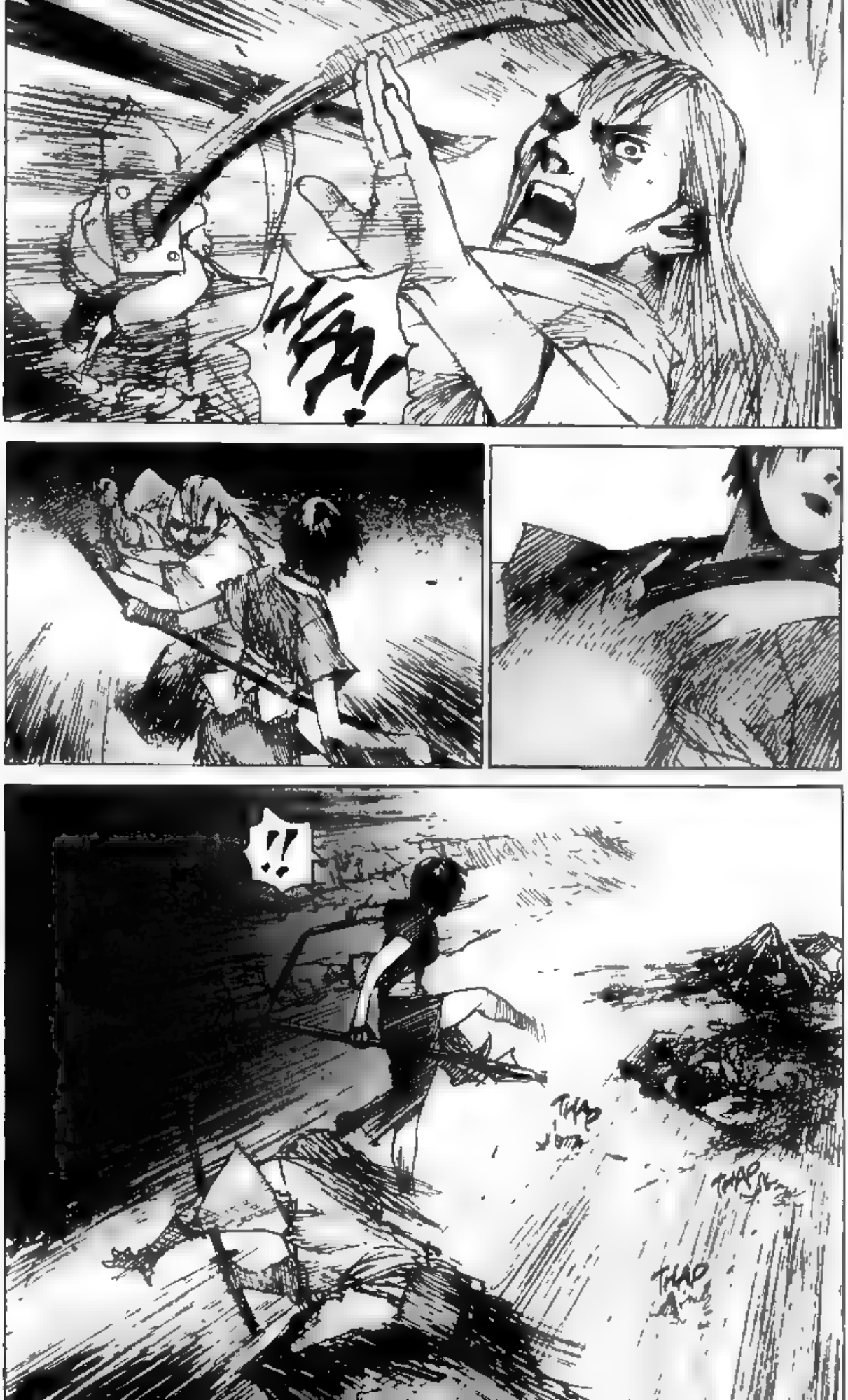
OKAY, BABE... GO FOR IT!
AND WHEN SHE DOES...

SHE'LL KICK, BUT NO PROB. FOR THEM. IT WAS...
...BUT NOT FOR ME.

...SOAK UP THE BLOW!
TAKE IT FULL ON AND STOP IT!

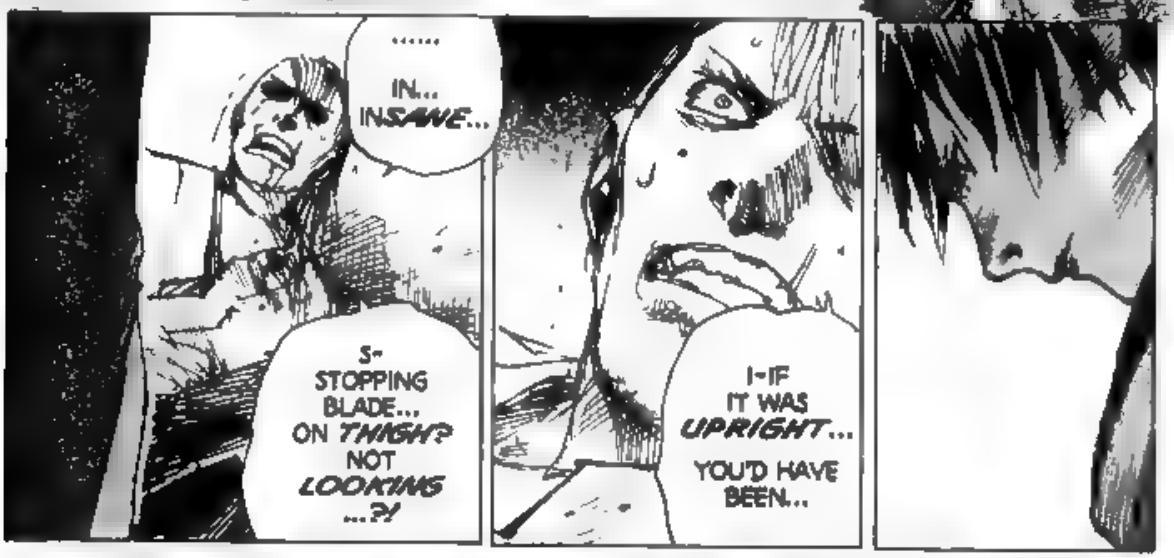
REBOUND! ONE STROKE!


GM!

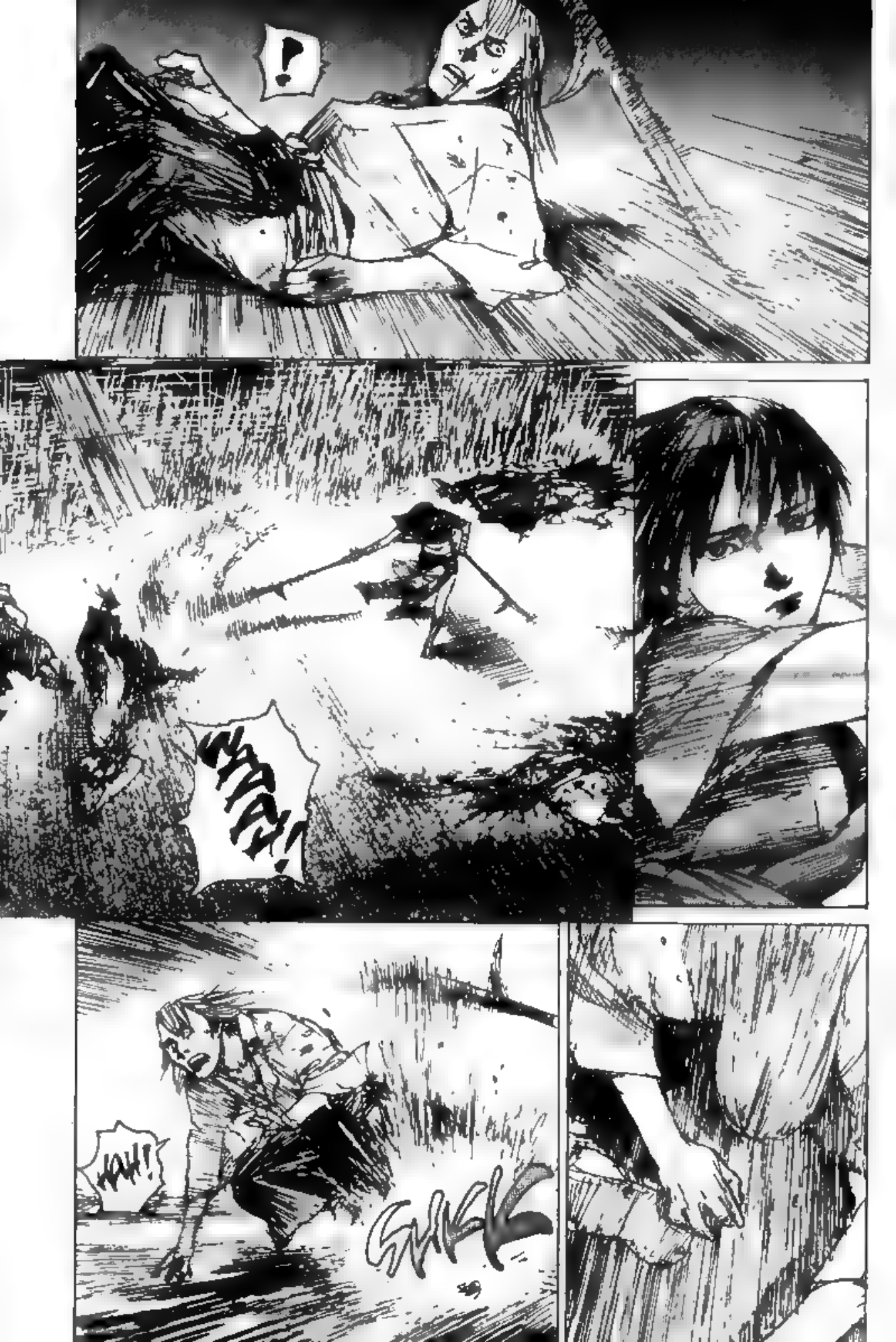

HEH!
!!
THAP
THAP
THAP

GOT YOU!!
WHA--?!
SNAK
KICK

GHUK
NNG...
AH...?!
AUGH!!

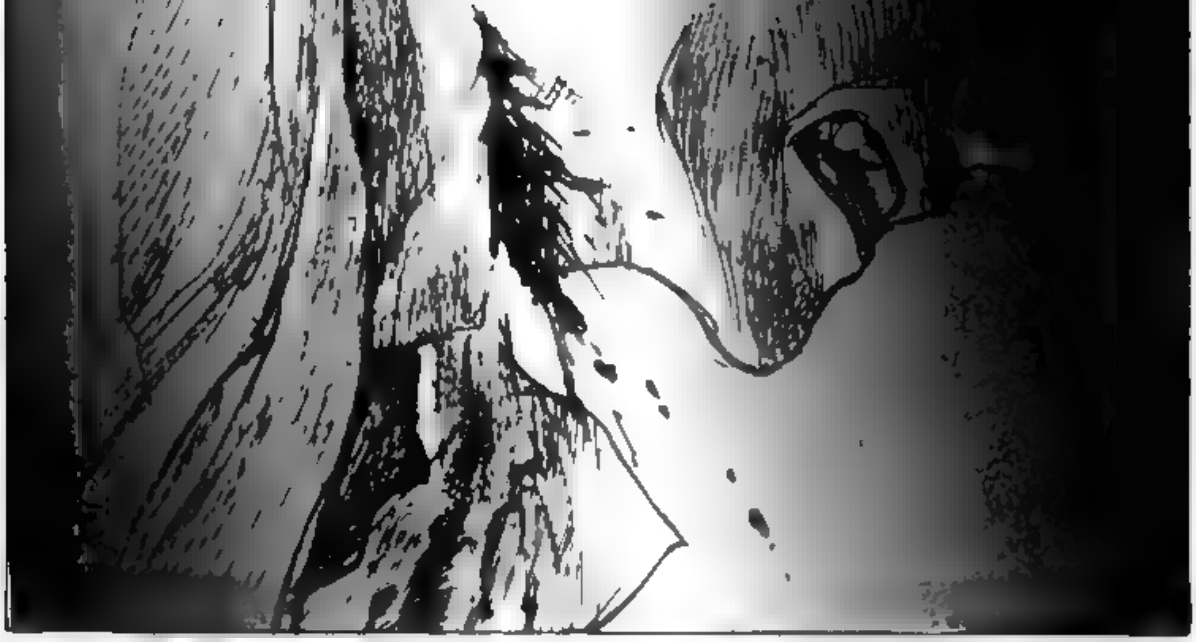

.....
IN... INSANE...
S- STOPPING BLADE... ON THIGH? NOT LOOKING ...?!
I-IF IT WAS UPRIGHT...
YOU'D HAVE BEEN...

WHEN STRIKING INTO A CHEST FROM BEHIND, THE BLADE SHOULD BE HORIZON-TAL...
...OR THE RIBCAGE ABSORBS THE BLOW AND SPARES THE VITAL ORGANS. YOU ARE SKILLED... YOU WOULD KNOW THIS.


!
SWISH!
HAH!
SWISH

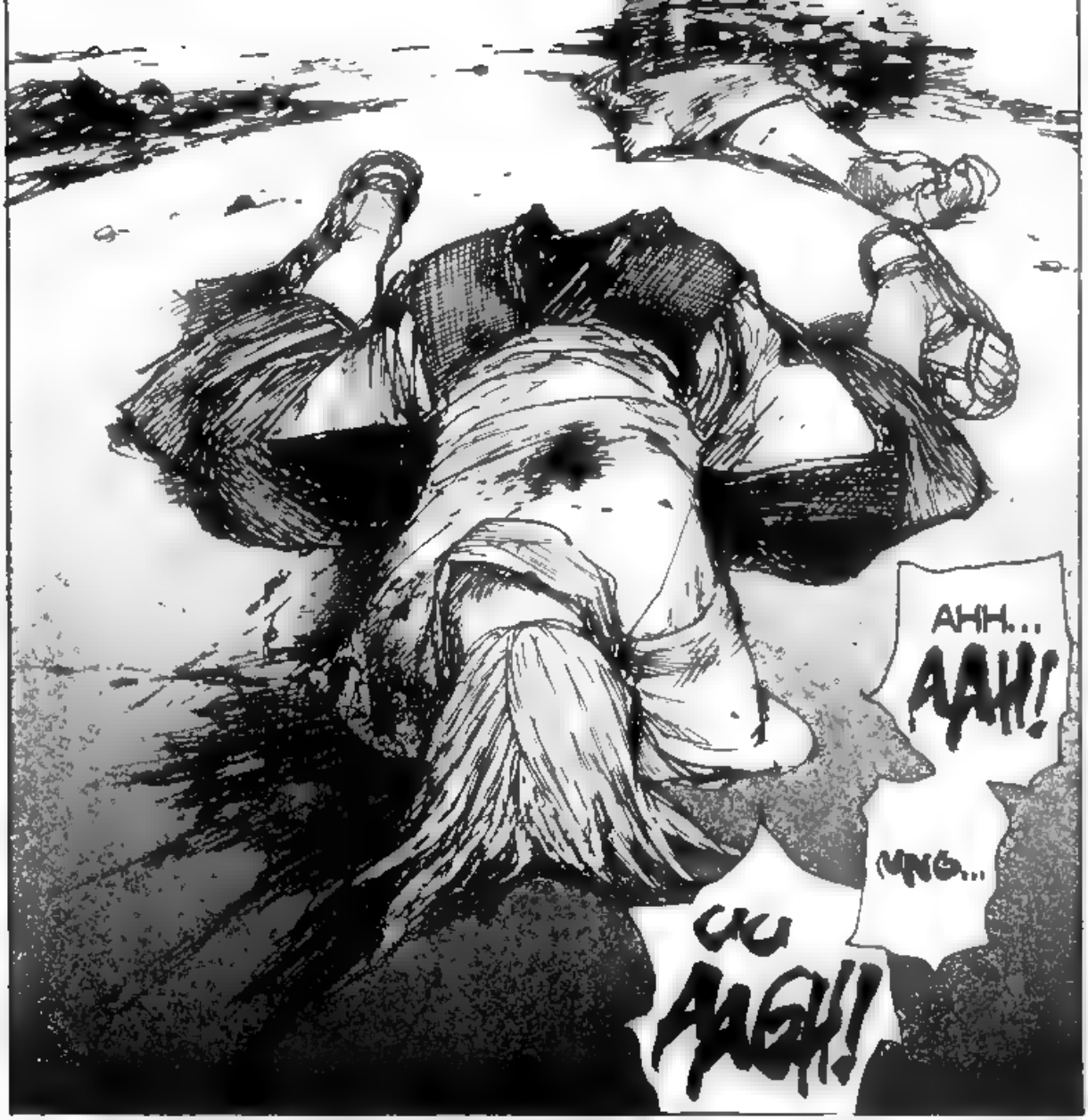
DAMN IT...!
GOD DAMN IT!!
!!
THP

LAST BLOOD
Part 4



I'M A MOUNTAIN BOY, SEE?
IT'S EASY, TRICKING DŌJŌ KIDS LIKE YOU ONTO THIS FOOTING.
SORRY, GUYS.

BUT YOU WERE GOOD, YOU TWO.
DAMNED GOOD.
REST IN PEACE.


AHH...
AAH!
MNG...
UU
AAGH!

AW, SHIT
MAKIE-SAN!!

HE'S ALREADY... .....
I MEAN... YOU'VE *WON*, RIGHT?

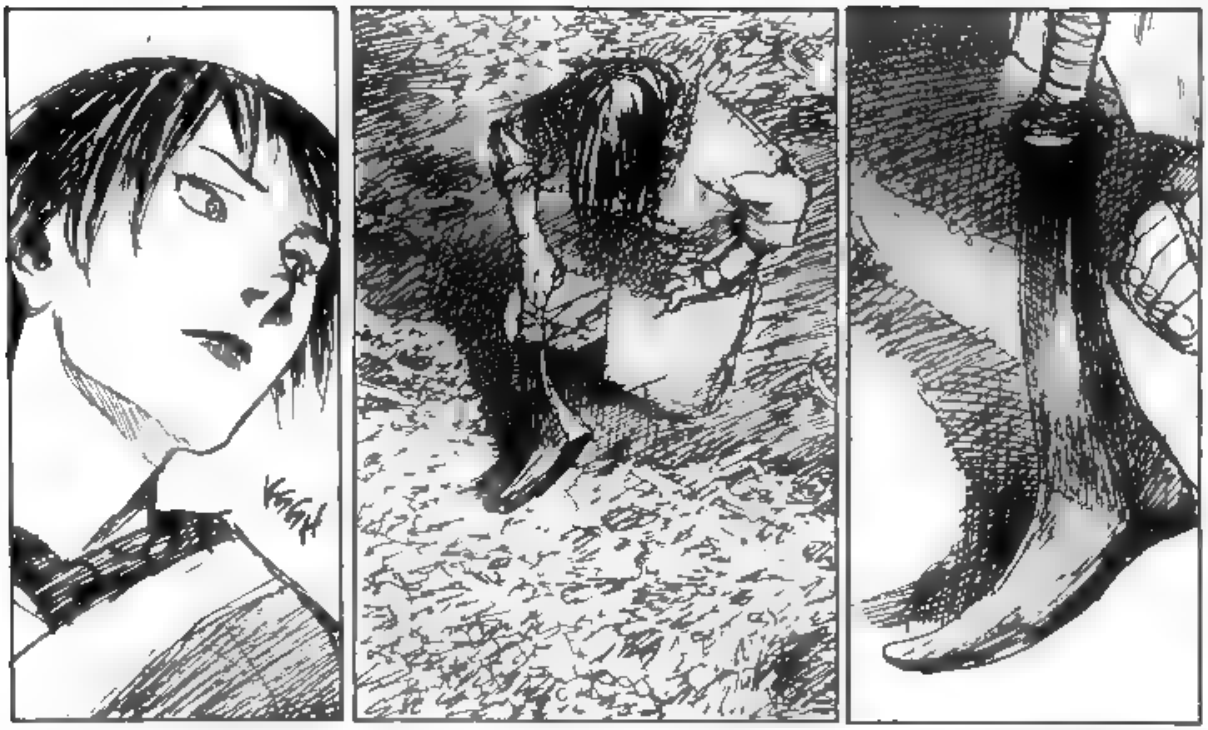
NO...

GOD DAMN IT, NO!
DON'T *DO THAT* TO ME!!

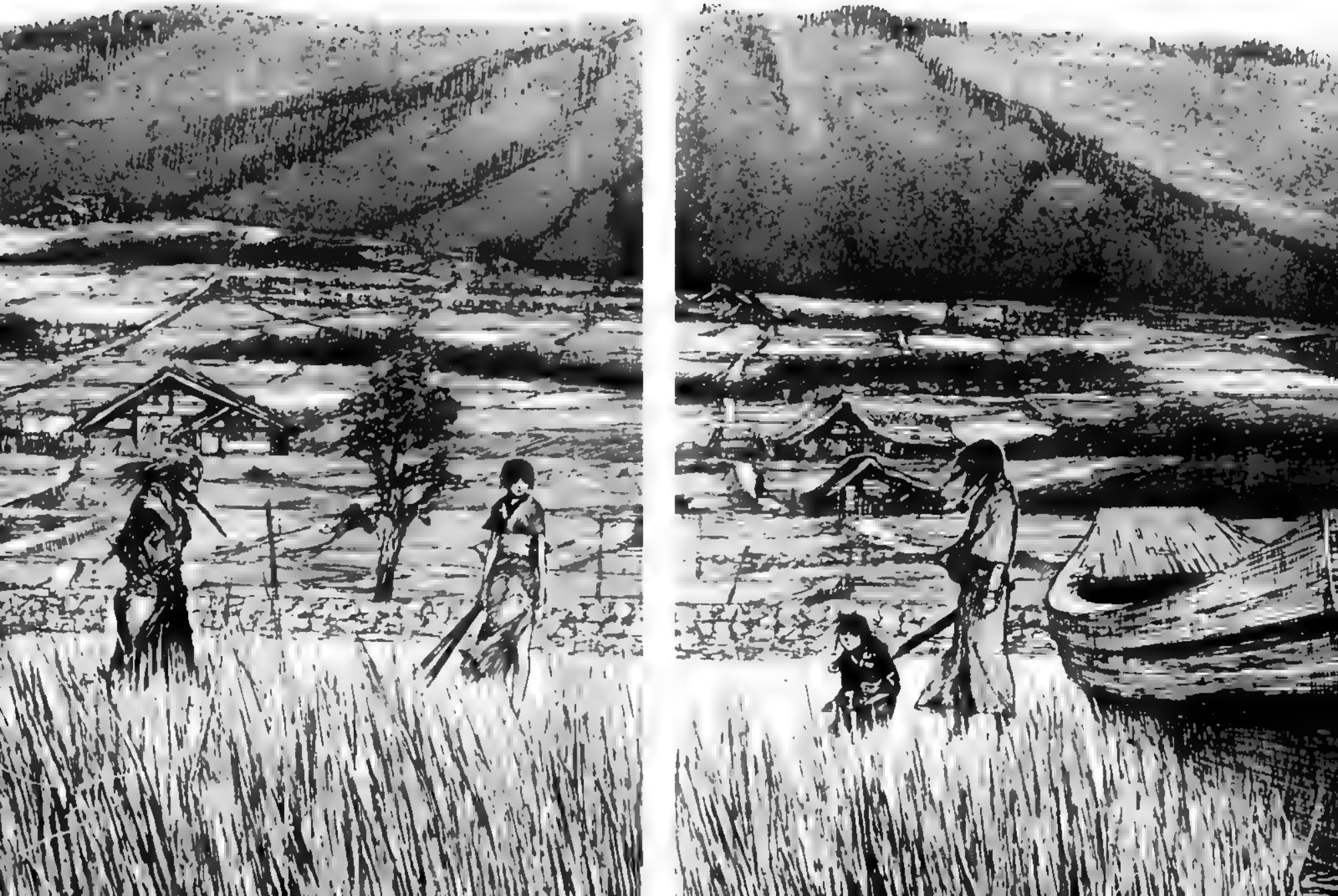
TH-
THE
GUYS
HERE...
NO, THE GUYS WHO *WERE* HERE... WE DIDN'T COME ALL THIS WAY TO BE...
TO END UP LIKE... LIKE *THIS.*
HIM! WE WERE AFTER *HIM.*
ANOTSU KAGEHISA!

W-WE... LEFT THE DOJO GATE, READY NEVER TO RETURN.
I'M NOT AFRAID TO DIE... NO. ABSOLUTELY NOT...
ONLY... NOT BY YOU!
I DIDN'T COME HERE TO BE KILLED BY YOU!
LET ME FIGHT HIM!!
WOO WOO
GIVE ME MY SHOW-DOWN WITH HIM!!

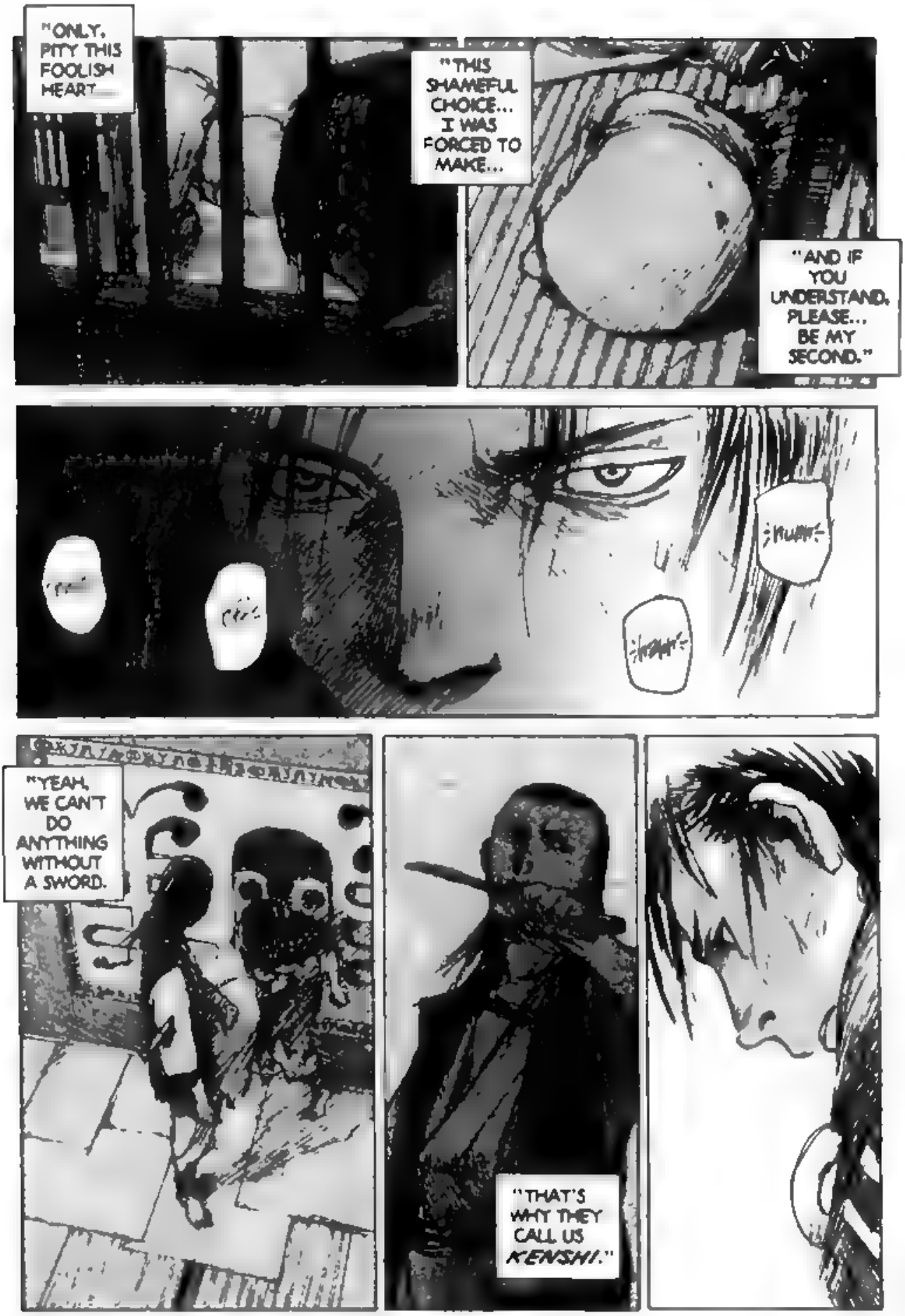
Y-YES...WE DREW AGAINST YOU FIRST. I APOLOGIZE! I SEE NOW THAT YOU'RE BETTER THAN ANY OF US...
BUT YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH? RIGHT?
I BEG YOU!
LET ME FIGHT THAT GUY... ONE MORE TIME!



AMOTSU KAGENISA!
FWAP
!
HMPH... PATHETIC. BUT USE IT!
IT'S YOURS, ANY-WAY...



CHANCES ARE... MORE THAN FIFTY-FIFTY...
HE'S GOING TO DIE.
WHAT I DON'T GET IS... I DON'T FEEL ANYTHING.
HAS FATIGUE DRAINED MY HEART?
OR IS IT...
.....
.....
AND THAT WOMAN!
HOW CAN SHE JUST WATCH LIKE THAT? SO... DETACHED.


"ONLY, PITY THIS FOOLISH HEART...
"THIS SHAMEFUL CHOICE... I WAS FORCED TO MAKE...
"AND IF YOU UNDERSTAND, PLEASE... BE MY SECOND."
"YEAH, WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING WITHOUT A SWORD.
"THAT'S WHY THEY CALL US KENSHI."

THEY'RE ALL IDIOTS.
WHY DOES EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM DO THIS SORT OF STUPID THING?!
WHY DO THEY ALL...
...WIND UP AT A MOMENT LIKE THIS?
WHAT-EVER HAPPENED ON THAT MOUN-TAIN...
...THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A WAY TO SETTLE IT WITHOUT BLOOD.

"...ALL I THOUGHT OF... ANOTSU-DONO."
"THAT CHILD'S HAPPINESS... THAT'S ALL...
"HOW COULD IT *TURN OUT* THIS WAY?!
"...WHERE... *WHERE* DID I GO *WRONG*...?!"

nahh
nahh!
nff
nahh
.....!

?!
NNG--
TVAP
AAG...
NG!
ANN!

LAST BLOOD
Part 5

NNGH...
.....
.....
NNN...
AUGH!

YOU...
YOU LET ME... .....
KRSD

WHEN I SAW YOU IN SHIRAKAWA, I COULD TELL YOUR BODY WAS STRUGGLING.
SO I FOLLOWED YOU...
.....
.....
I-IRIYA...
SO... YOU LOST...?
TOO... BAD.

.....
.....
DAMN...
EVERY-
BODY...
DEAD?
HEH...
HEH HEH
HEH...

GUESS WE DON'T EVEN GET...
TIME... TO MOURN.
MASTER IOANE...
MISTRESS HISOKA...
I'M... SORRY.

AH!
HEY, LADY!
QUITE A SHOW, YO!
hff
nahh
nick

ANOTSU
KAGEHISA
!

YOU DO IT FOR THE COUNTRY... AND SEE WHAT THANKS YOU GET!
YOU POOR GUY...
BUT EVEN SO... NEVER FORGET WHAT YOU TOLD ME!
NEVER FORGET!
THERE'S NO WAY I'LL LET YOU!
SO LISTEN, AND REMEMBER!
NO MATTER HOW MANY YOU KILL!
NO MATTER HOW MANY OF YOU DIE!

NO MATTER HOW MANY BETRAYALS BY THOSE YOU TRUST!
IF YOU WANT TO TEAR DOWN THE SWORD SCHOOL WALLS... JUST TRY AND DO IT!
KEEP DREAMING... YOUR DREAMS OF WAR! YOU SEE HOW IT IS?
LIKE... THIS!
FOR NOW, I'LL WAIT. AND SEE HOW FAR YOU GO!
MAYBE THE ITTŌ-RYŪ WINS! MAYBE IT IS DESTROYED! BUT WHEN I KNOW FOR SURE...

I'LL COME TO KILL YOU!!
WITHOUT FAIL!
SO... NEVER FORGET!

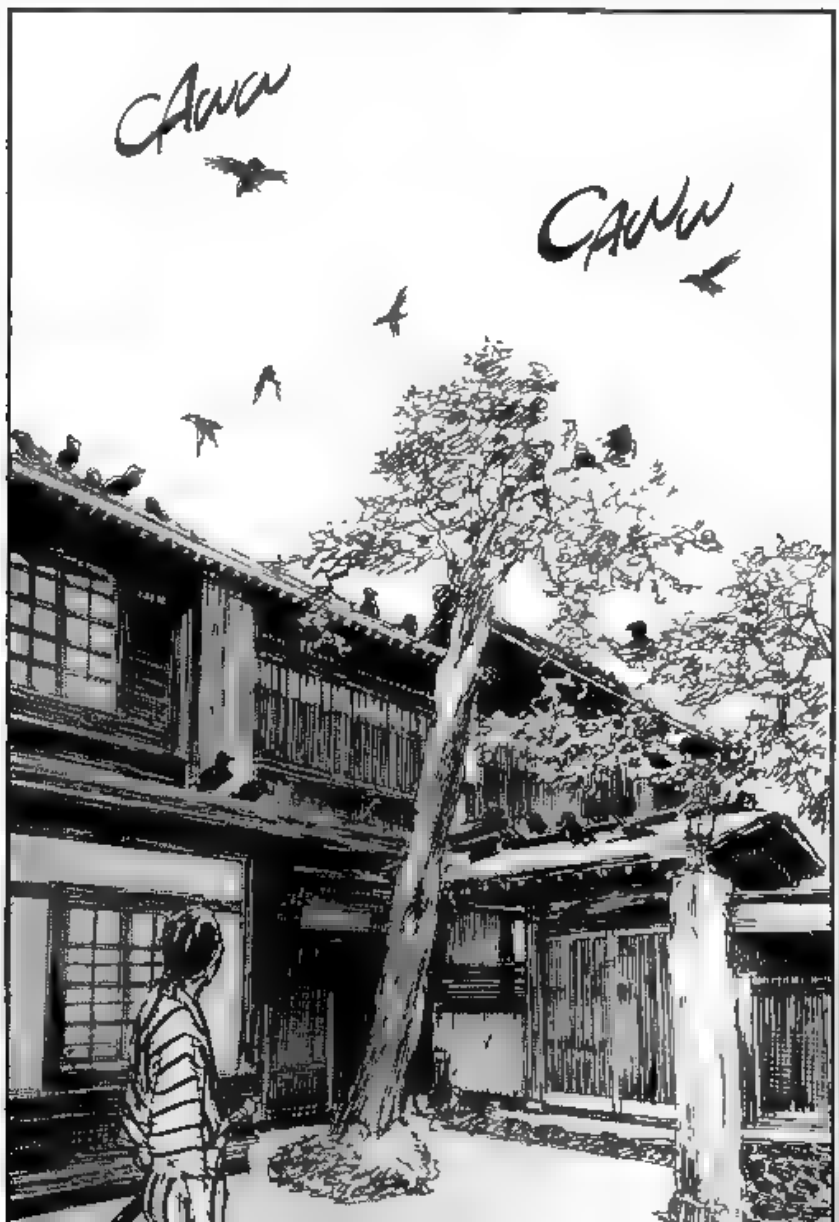
I...I DON'T KNOW. ONLY, FROM HERE ON OUT...
...NO MATTER WHERE THAT GUY IS, WHAT HE'S DOING...
...ARE YOU *REALLY* COOL WITH THAT?
DON'T KNOW WHAT WENT ON, BUT...
IT'S WEIRD, BUT... I JUST *KNOW* IT.
...I'LL *NEVER* LOSE TRACK OF HIM AGAIN.
HEY, RIN!
.....
.....

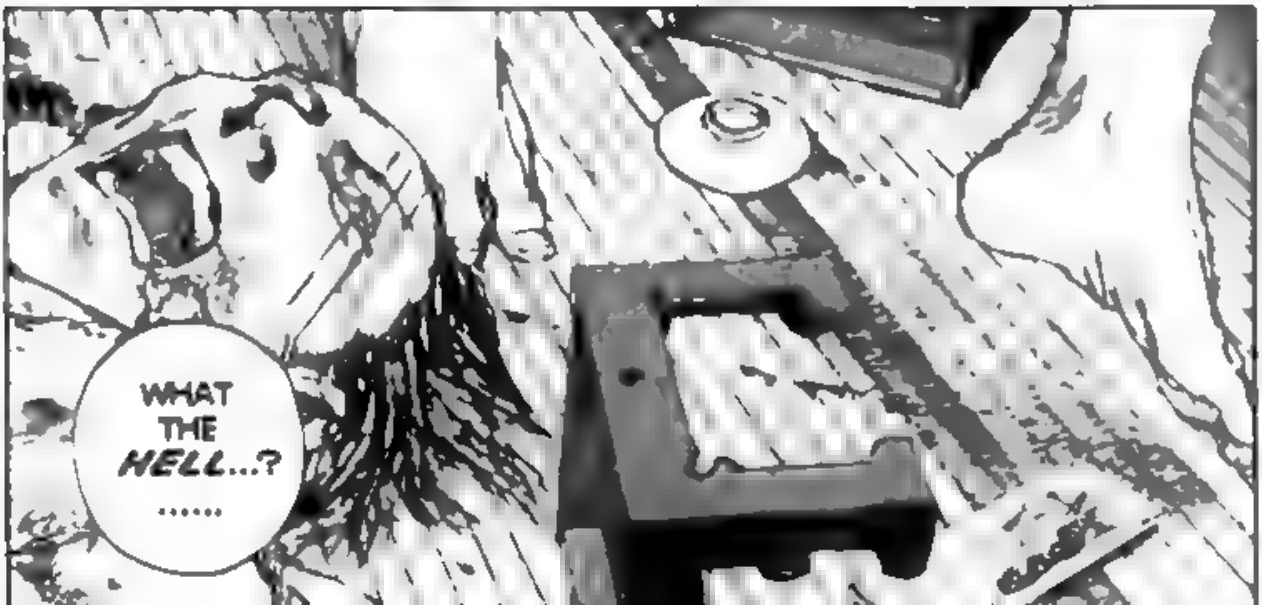
WHAT'S UP WITH YOUR FOOT?!
HUH...? OH... YEAH.
LOOKS LIKE YOU TORE A NAIL OR SOMETHING.
SHEESH. OH, WELL... HERE.
C'MON... WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
YOU LITTLE IDIOT! I WANT TO GET SOME GRUB, A BATH, AND SHUT-EYE!
NOTHING! I... I'M OKAY. I CAN WALK.
IT'S FASTER THIS WAY, SO STOP YOUR WHINING AND GET ON!

?
HEY... YOU LOSE SOME WEIGHT?
YEAH... I USED UP ALL MY GOLDEN WASPS...
LOST MY MONEY, AND... AND...
YOU REALLY CAN'T TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, CAN YOU?
YA DAMN KID...!

M-
MANJI
SAVE ME!
OUCH!
MY
NECK!
CUT IT
OUT!

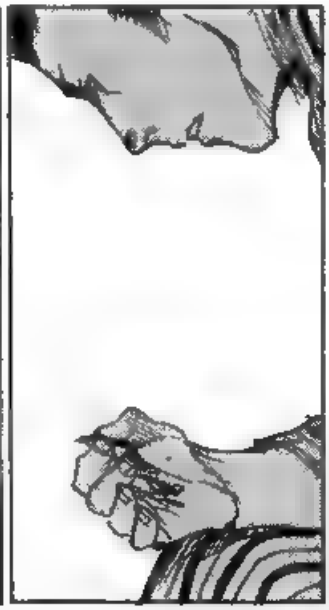
FIVE
DAYS
LATER
...


CAWW
CAWW


WHAT THE HELL...?
.....

MAN... I'VE SEEN PEOPLE LEAVE A MESS AFTER A PARTY BEFORE, BUT THIS...
CHRIST, WHAT A STINK! I'VE NEVER SMELLED IT SO BAD.
ROTTEN FOOD...
...VOMIT... AND DEATH.
HEY!! ANYBODY ALIVE IN HERE?!
YO!
M... MAGA... TSU...
.....

BUT...
I HUNG ON...
ROTTEN GRUB...
LEFTOVER SAKE...
HAHH
THIS TIME...
...THOUGHT DEATH HAD ME FOR SURE.
WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED HERE, MY FRIEND? DON'T TELL ME A BUNCH OF RETAINERS AND EDO BUREAU-CRATS...
...CAN KICK THE ITTŌ-RYŪ'S BUTT?
"A BUNCH," YOU SAY...?
HEH...
TRY TWO OF 'EM!



AH! I GET IT...
SLICE AND STEW THESE, AND MOST FOLK'D THINK IT WAS SHIITAKE. BUT THIS IS *TSUKIYO-TAKE!* *
ONE BITE, AND YOU'LL PUKE YOUR GUTS OUT FOR SURE... BUT WAIT A SEC!
IT'S NOT DEADLY ENOUGH TO KILL A *GROWN MAN.*

* POISONOUS MUSHROOM UNIQUE TO JAPAN.

YEAH, IT WON'T KILL YA, BUT... GUESS THEY FIGURED IF WE WERE SICK AS DOGS...
...THAT WOULD BE GOOD ENOUGH.
AND IT WAS.
DAMN...!
SURE. WE WERE POISONED... BUT THE BOYS I BROUGHT HERE WERE HARDCORE... STONE KILLERS.
THE HEADS OF OUR DOJOS IN ALL THE HAN. AND TO JUST SLICE 'EM DOWN... THOSE TWO BASTARDS WERE GOOD.
AND THE LEADER WAS--
I KNOW ALREADY.
THE GUY WHO INVITED US TO FEAST WHILE THE BOSS WAS AWAY, RIGHT?
SO THEY COULD GET US ALL IN ONE PLACE WITHOUT HIM.

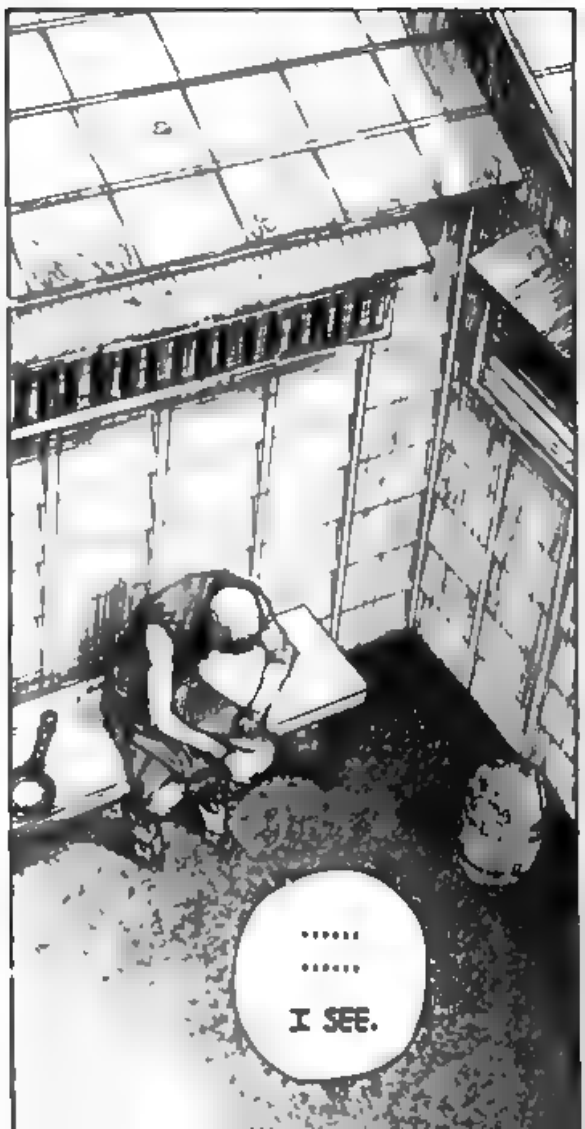
ABA-YAMA...
REMEMBER WHAT I SAID WAY BACK...? ABOUT SOME GUY OR GROUP CALLED "AKAGI"...?
I FINALLY REALIZED...
...I HEARD IT WRONG.
I HAD THE ANSWER ALL ALONG!
JUST DIDN'T HAVE THE GUTS TO FACE THE WORST CASE SCENARIO.

"I THOUGHT THAT GUY LUGGING MY PALANQUIN SAID AKAGI...
"BUT HE DIDN'T. POOR SON OF A BITCH WAS CHOKING ON HIS OWN BLOOD."

WHAT HE WAS *TRYING* TO SAY WAS...
"...KAGI-AURA!"

CONFESSION

GICHI...?
HERE. TAKE THIS.
OUR "FEAST" WENT WELL.
THE GO-RŌJŪ WERE QUITE PLEASED, AND SENT THIS SAKE.
IT WAS NOTHING... BUT I APPRECIATE THE THOUGHT.
YOUR WORDS MAKE WHAT I MUST TELL YOU THAT MUCH HARDER, GICHI.
YOUR SON IN THE HOSPITAL... .....
HE DIED THIS MORNING.

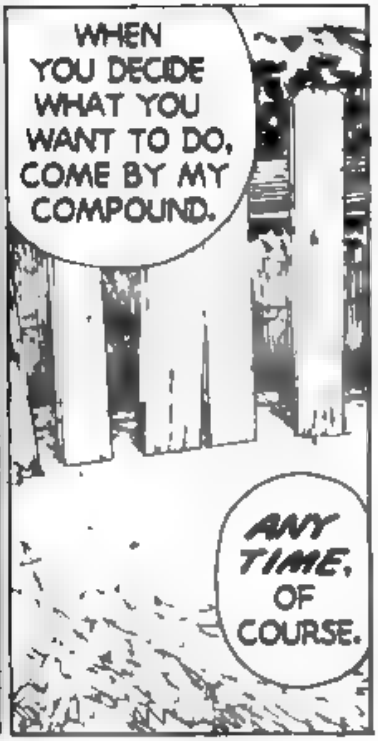

.....
.....
I SEE.

.....
.....
WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW?

YOUR BODY COUNT FOR US... IT'S UP TO SIXTY-ONE.

THE PAPERWORK FOR YOUR PARDON, OUR PAYMENT FOR YOUR SON'S *TREAT-MENT*...
DEDUCT THEM BOTH, AND YOU CAN STILL BE BACK ON THE STREET, A FREE MAN, WITH SEVENTY *RYŌ*.

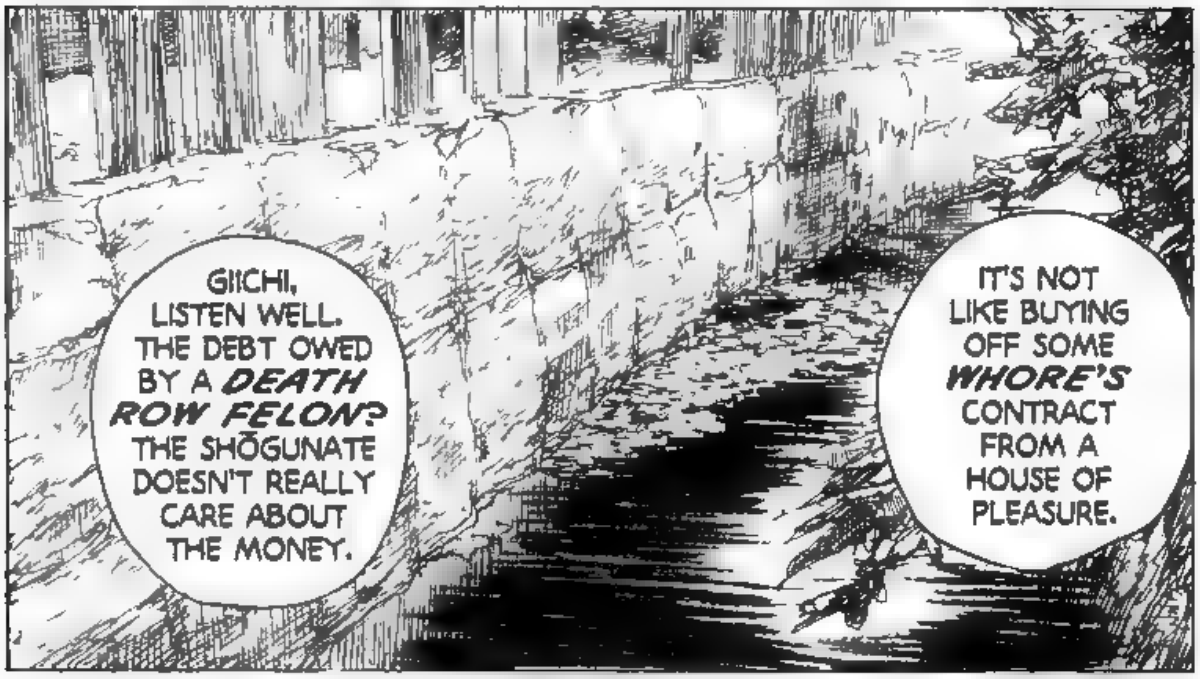
PERHAPS THIS IS NOT THE BEST TIME TO ASK.

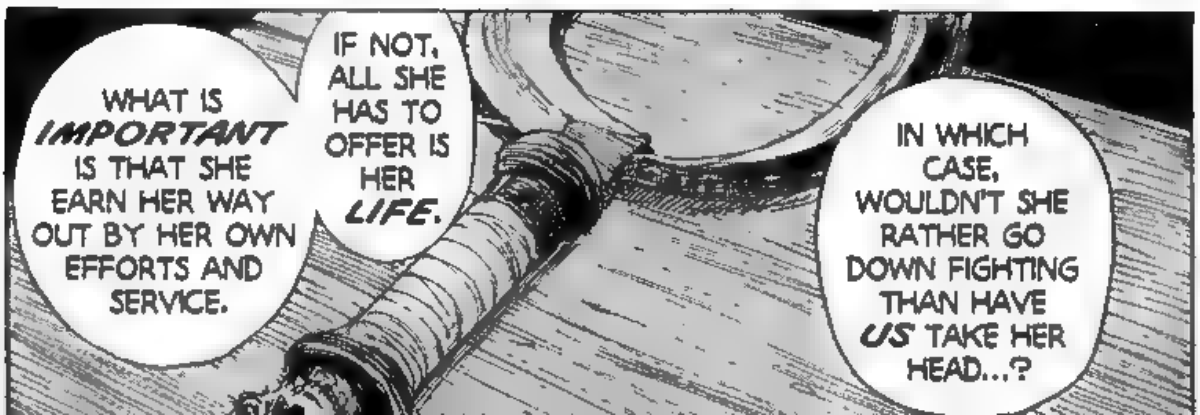

WHEN YOU DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT TO DO, COME BY MY COMPOUND.
ANY TIME, OF COURSE.

WAIT, HABAKI.
I ALREADY KNOW HOW I WANT TO USE IT.

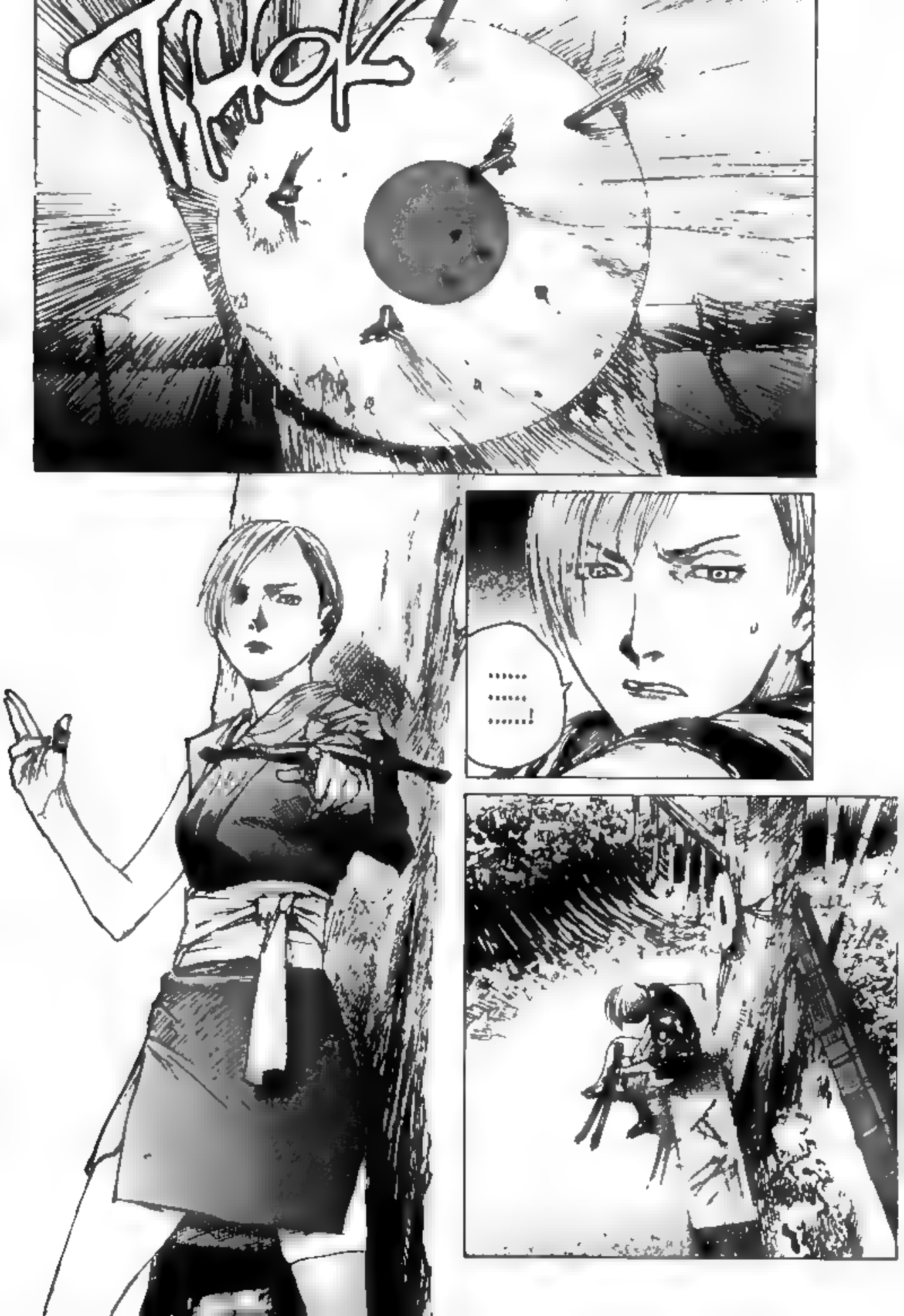
RELEASE THAT WOMAN FROM THE MUGAI-RYŪ.
FORTY RYŌ SHOULD DO IT, YES...?
THAT WOMAN...?
AH... HYAKU-RIN?
"SHE'S WORTH-LESS TO YOU NOW.
"SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN UNSTABLE FOR SOLO WORK... AND NOW-- HER ARM IS FINISHED.
"SHE DOESN'T SEE IT YET... OR IF SHE DOES, SHE'LL GO TRY TO FULFILL HER NEXT MISSION ANYWAY.
"AND THEN SHE'LL BE DEAD."
THIS IS MY REQUEST, HABAKI KAGIMURA.

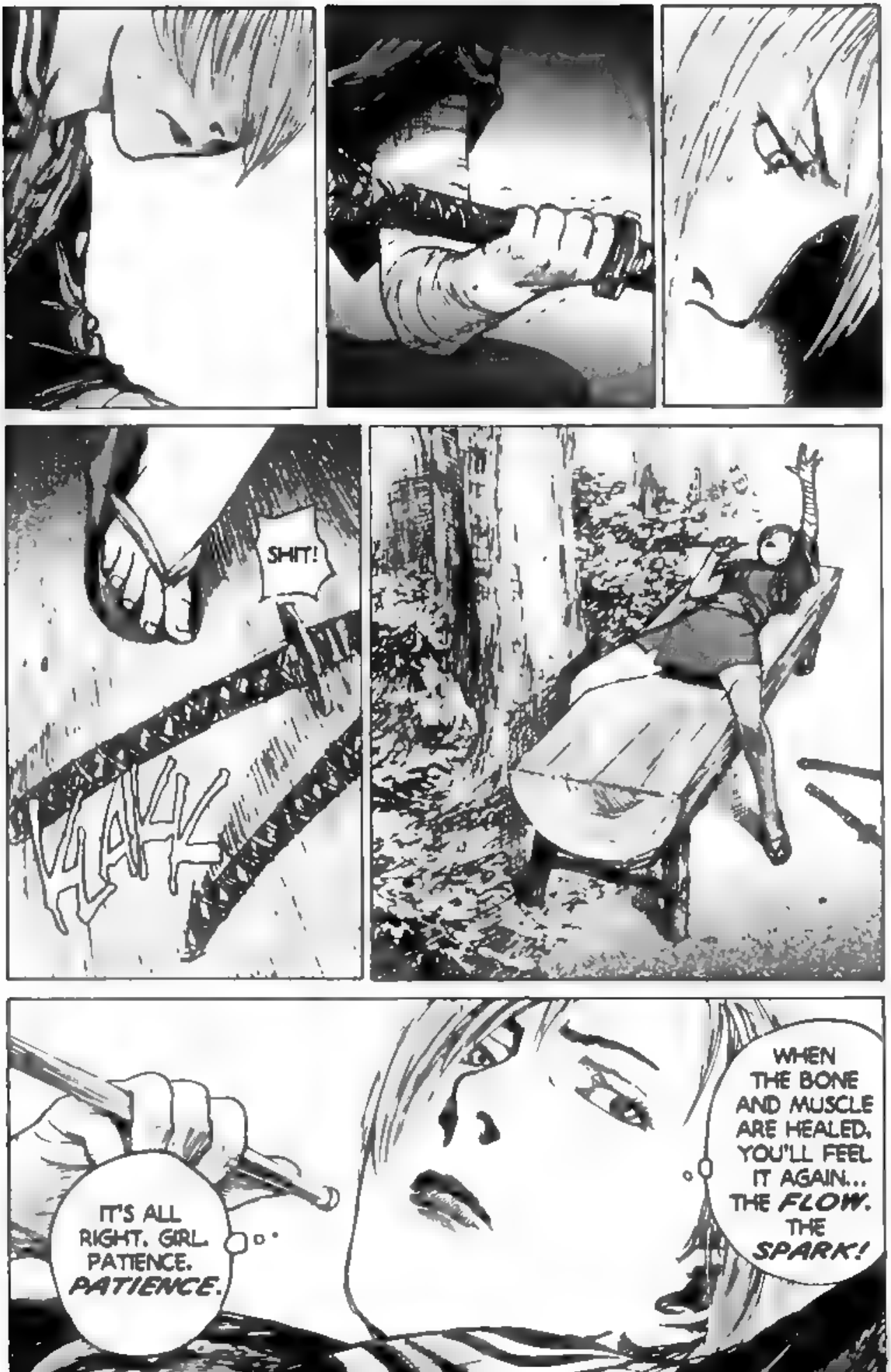
HMM.
.....
THE TIES OF AFFECTION, GIICHI?
NO MATTER.
I MUST REFUSE!


GIICHI, LISTEN WELL. THE DEBT OWED BY A DEATH ROW FELON? THE SHŌGUNATE DOESN'T REALLY CARE ABOUT THE MONEY.
IT'S NOT LIKE BUYING OFF SOME WHORE'S CONTRACT FROM A HOUSE OF PLEASURE.


WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT SHE EARN HER WAY OUT BY HER OWN EFFORTS AND SERVICE.
IF NOT, ALL SHE HAS TO OFFER IS HER LIFE.
IN WHICH CASE, WOULDN'T SHE RATHER GO DOWN FIGHTING THAN HAVE US TAKE HER HEAD...?

HOW ABOUT ALL OF IT? SEVENTY RYŌ?
AGAIN, IT'S NOT THE MONEY, GIICHI. THE ANSWER IS NO.
.....
.....
WAIT, GIICHI.
"UNDER ONE CONDITION..."



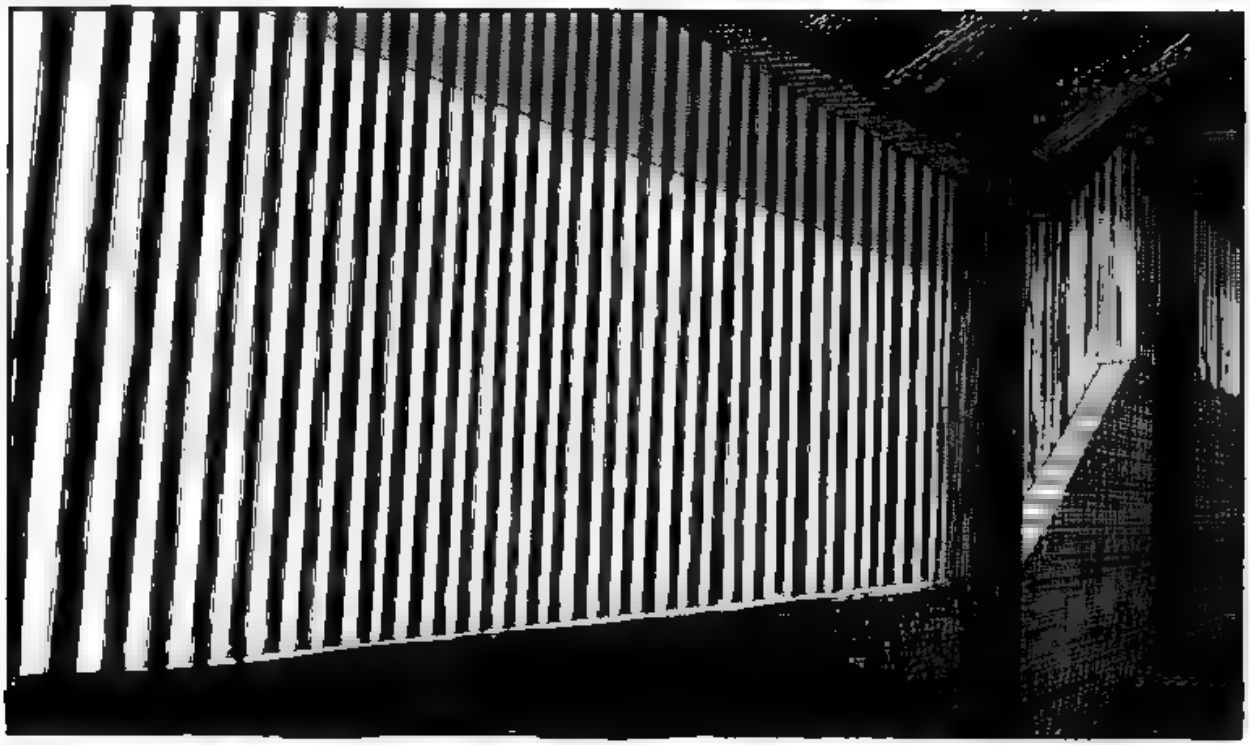

SHIT!
KLAK
IT'S ALL RIGHT, GIRL. PATIENCE. PATIENCE.
WHEN THE BONE AND MUSCLE ARE HEALED, YOU'LL FEEL IT AGAIN... THE FLOW. THE SPARK!

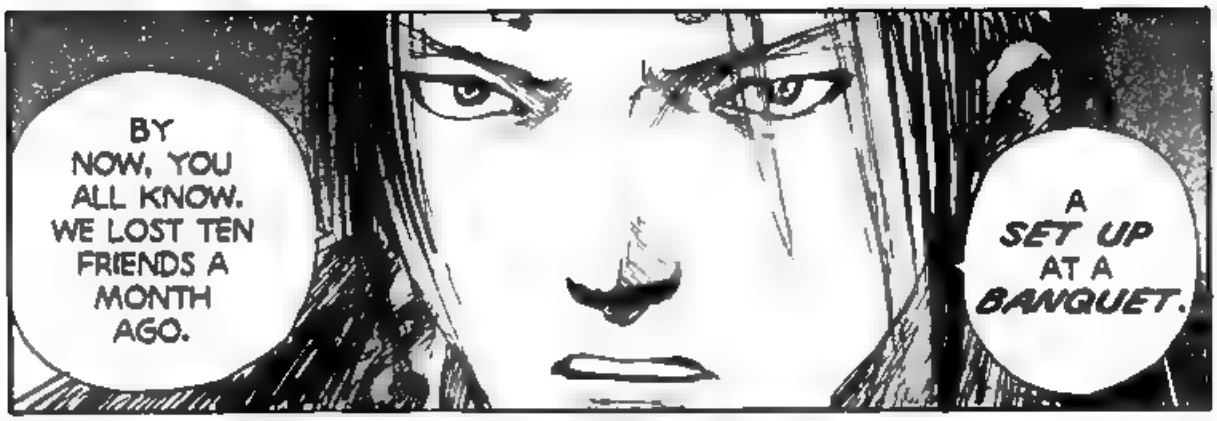
MNGH..
.....

AH...

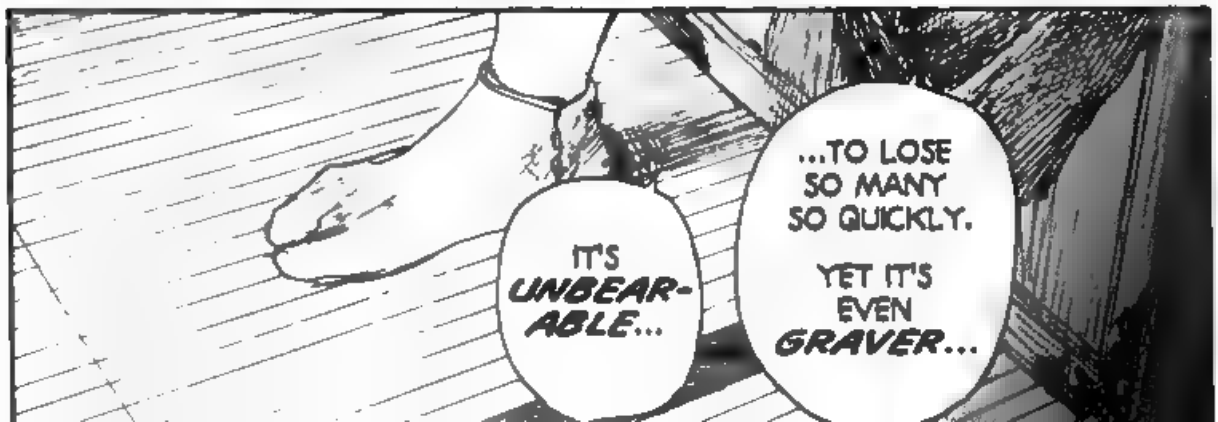
TWILIGHT
Part 1

ITTŌ-RYŪ




BY NOW, YOU ALL KNOW. WE LOST TEN FRIENDS A MONTH AGO.
A *SET UP* AT A *BANQUET*.

A PLOT BY *HABAKI KAGIMURA, BAN-GASHIRA.*
THE MAN WE CALLED "AKAGI"... *REVEALED.*


IT'S *UNBEAR-ABLE...*
...TO LOSE SO MANY SO QUICKLY.
YET IT'S EVEN *GRAVER...*

...THAT OF THE TEN, NINE WERE LEADERS OF "OUR" DŌJŌ...
...FROM MUSASHI EDO TO KAI AND SAGAMI!
PUTTIN' IT DIFF'RENT...
...WE GOT A BAD ASS ENEMY?
HE'S GONE AN' FLIPPED NINE DŌJŌ?
EXACT-LY.

ALL DUE TO MY POOR JUDGE-MENT!
FORGIVE ME. I WAS... FULL OF MYSELF.
ALL WAS GOING SO WELL... I BECAME OVER-CONFIDENT.
NO POINT REHASH-ING IT. NOT NOW...
THE TEN OF US RIGHT HERE?
THE REAL QUESTION IS, CAN WE RIDE OUT THIS [redacted] WITH JUST OUR CORE ITTŌ-RYŪ?
WHADDYA SAY?

ISN'T...
...ISN'T TEN ENOUGH...?
YEAH, SO THEY GOT TEN OF US AT A FEAST.
THEY GOTTA FIGHT *DIRTY* JUST TO BEAT US!
FOR TWO YEARS, WE *SCRAMBLED.*
CONSOLIDATED DŌJŌ AND SWORD SCHOOLS.
WE DID IT TO PROVE OUR *STRENGTH* AND *WILL.*
NOT TO BE *BURDENED* WITH *KENSHI.*
*TŌSHU,** ALLOW ME TO BE *FRANK.*
*LEADER.

REGRETTABLY, WHERE WE SAW PATRIOTISM, THEY SAW REBELLION. WE SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED DECEIT!
NOW WE MUST STAND FIRM! MAKE OR BREAK!
ITTŌ-RYŪ HAS NOTHING TO TEACH.
IF ANYONE POUNDS ON OUR DOOR...
...IT'S FROM LUST. FOR POWER.
THAT'S WHAT I THINK.
ANYONE WHO QUITS, KNOWING THAT...
...WAS NEVER ONE OF US, TŌSHU.

UH... I DON'T GOT BIG WORDS, BUT...
WHEN WE CAME TO EDO...?
THEY KILL OUR FRIENDS...
...WE GOTTA DO SOMETHIN'... I THINK.
THE NICE GUY WHO PUT US UP...? HE'S DEAD.
...KAGE-HISA?

THIS IS OUR LAST STAND!
WE'RE DOGS! PROUD OF OUR FANGS! WE ONCE WISHED TO SERVE OUR MASTER!
BUT IF OUR MASTER HAD GONE SOFT AND DECA-DENT...?
ALL THE MORE REASON TO KEEP OUR FANGS SHARP!
IF OUR MASTER'S A FOOL WHO WOULD PULL OUR TEETH... NO MORE!
WE WILL DEFEND OUR PRIDE, WITH ALL OUR SOULS!

THOUGH WE REND OUR MASTER LIMB FROM LIMB!

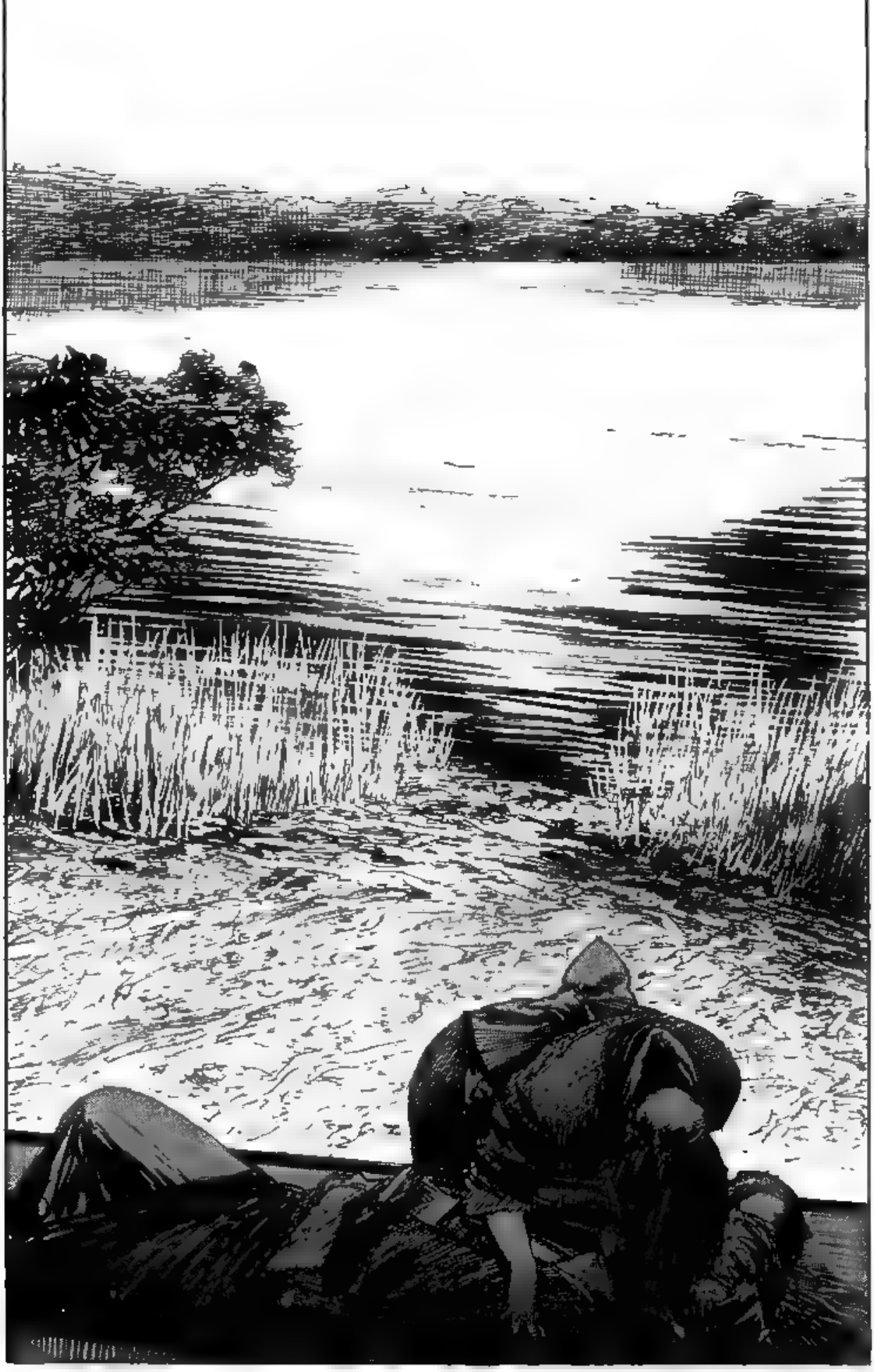
SHK

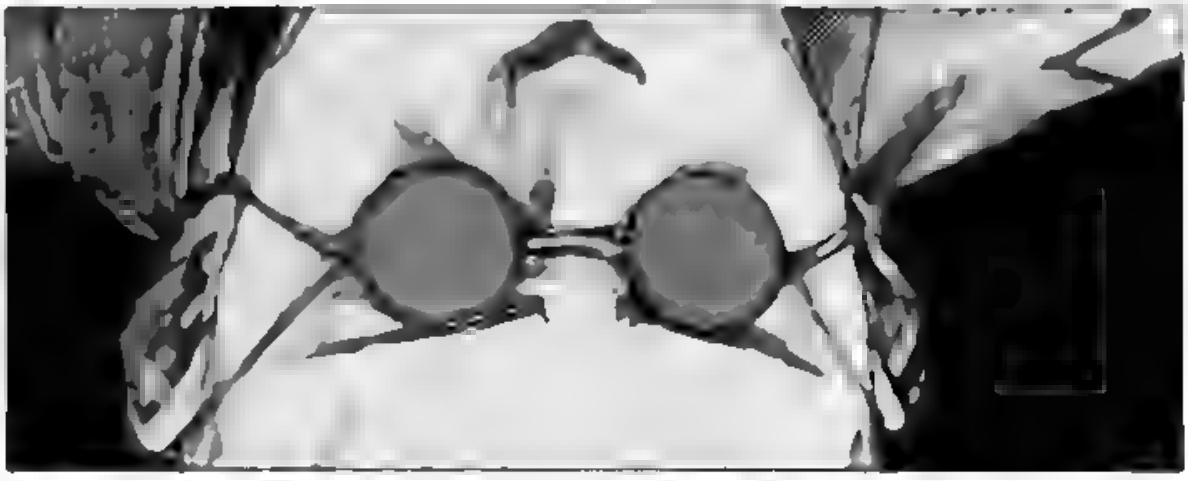
AWESOME!
SIX! I COULD BARELY DO FOUR BEFORE.
I DIDN'T GO TO KAGA FOR TRAINING...
BUT...
IT'S LIKE...
MY EYES... MY LEGS... SO NATURAL NOW.
OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT

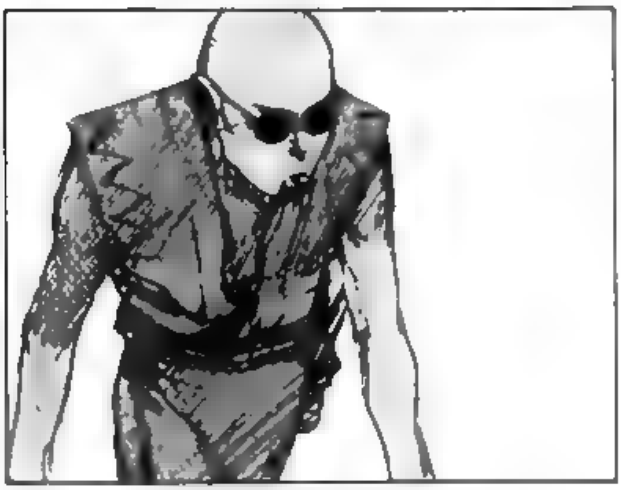
MANJI?
MANJI!
GASPING
PANTING
NOT...
HUNGRY...
PUFF
HE'S
SOAK-
ING...!

...AHH!
I WANNA CUDDLE...!
DAMN, DAMN, DAMN!
THOK
THOK
BUT... I CAN'T.
I CAN'T GO BACK THERE.
I'LL HAVE TO LEAVE THIS MAN BEHIND...
'CUZ... SOME-DAY...

...AND I MADE IT BACK.
...MANJI? I MET ANOTSU. ALL ALONE...
GIVE ME MY... REWARD...







NAME...
NAME...

MANJI'S IN THE HUT?
EH, UHM... YES!
OH RIGHT...! GIICHI!
RIN... WASN'T IT?
HUH? UHM, YES?
HOW OLD ARE YOU?
UH, UH... SIXTEEN.
SIX-TEEN...
OLD ENOUGH TO MAKE IT ALONE...

WHAT... ON EARTH?
AW, CRAP. HOW'D YOU FIND ME?
YOU ASK SHIRA?

WHAT'S WRONG?
...NOTHING.
WHAT I TELL YOU NOW... IS FROM HABAKI KAGIMURA, BAN-GASHIRA.
A BAKUFU ORDER.

EFFECTIVE TODAY, YOU JOIN THE MUGAI-RYŪ.
FINAL-LY...
HEH HEH...
YOUR RAP SHEET...
... IS EXTREME, EVEN FOR MUGAI-RYŪ.

FOUR YEARS AGO, YOU MURDERED HATAMOTO HORII SHIGENOBU.
...FOR TWO YEARS, THEY LET YOU SWIM. NO PURSUIT.
PLUS, MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED POLICE AND DEPUTIES. YET...
YES. THEY LET YOU SWIM. BECAUSE OF A CO-INCIDENCE OF INTERESTS...
...ITTO-RYU.
NOW THE TIME HAS COME...
...TO ADVANCE OUR PAWNS.

"THE OTHER DAY, WE PRUNED BACK *THEIR* RANKS."
"WE'VE ALSO HAD OUR *OWN LOSSES*."
"WE NEED *BODIES*, AND THERE'S NO TIME FOR TRAINING *AMATEURS*."
IF THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ* IS ALLOWED TO REBUILD, IT'LL BE *TOO LATE*.
WE NEED THE *POWER* TO TAKE THEM. *NOW*.
AND YOU WANT *ME*?
HEY, BIG *HONOR*.
IT'S NOT ABOUT *HONOR*.
IF *ITTŌ-RYŪ*'S A *POISON*...

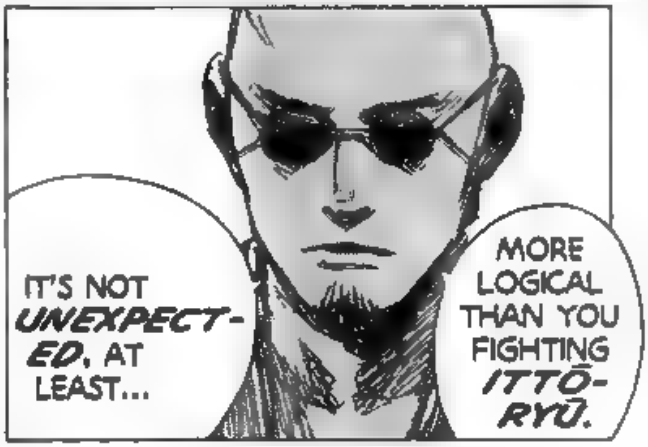
YOU AND I... ARE ALSO POISONS. IN *THEIR* EYES...
...KILLING *EACH OTHER* WORKS BEST OF ALL.
IF I SAY *FUCK OFF*?
I ADVISE YOU. THAT'S NOT AN OPTION.
REFUSE...
...AND *THIS* MAN TAKES YOUR LIFE.

HOH...!
NOW THAT SOUNDS FUN!

TWILIGHT
Part 2

.....
.....
WASN'T HE... OUR FRIEND?
WHY...?

Y'KNOW, I NEVER FIGURED...
...WE'D HAVE TO FIGHT EACH OTHER SO SOON.

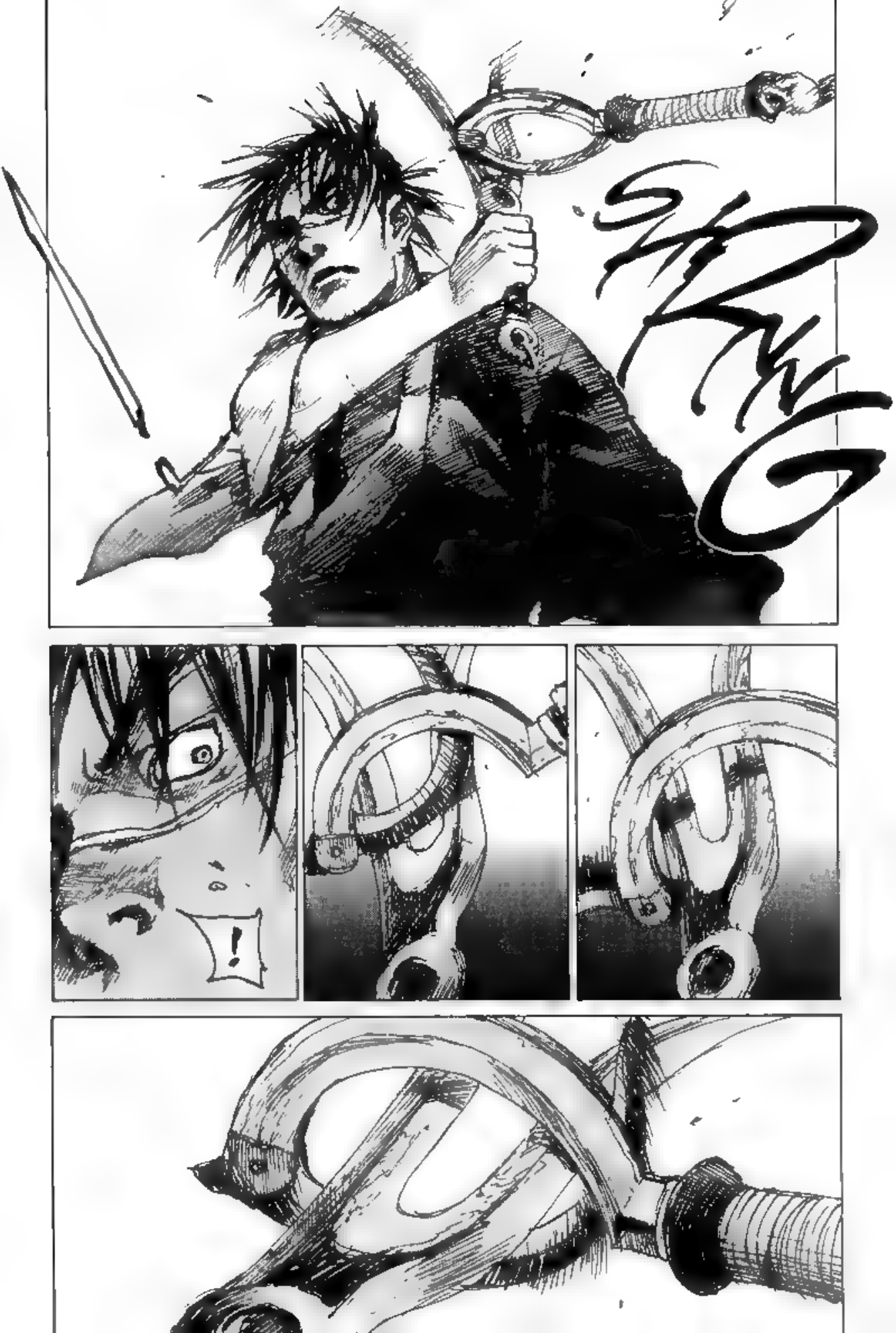

IT'S NOT UNEXPECTED, AT LEAST...
MORE LOGICAL THAN YOU FIGHTING ITTŌ-RYŪ.

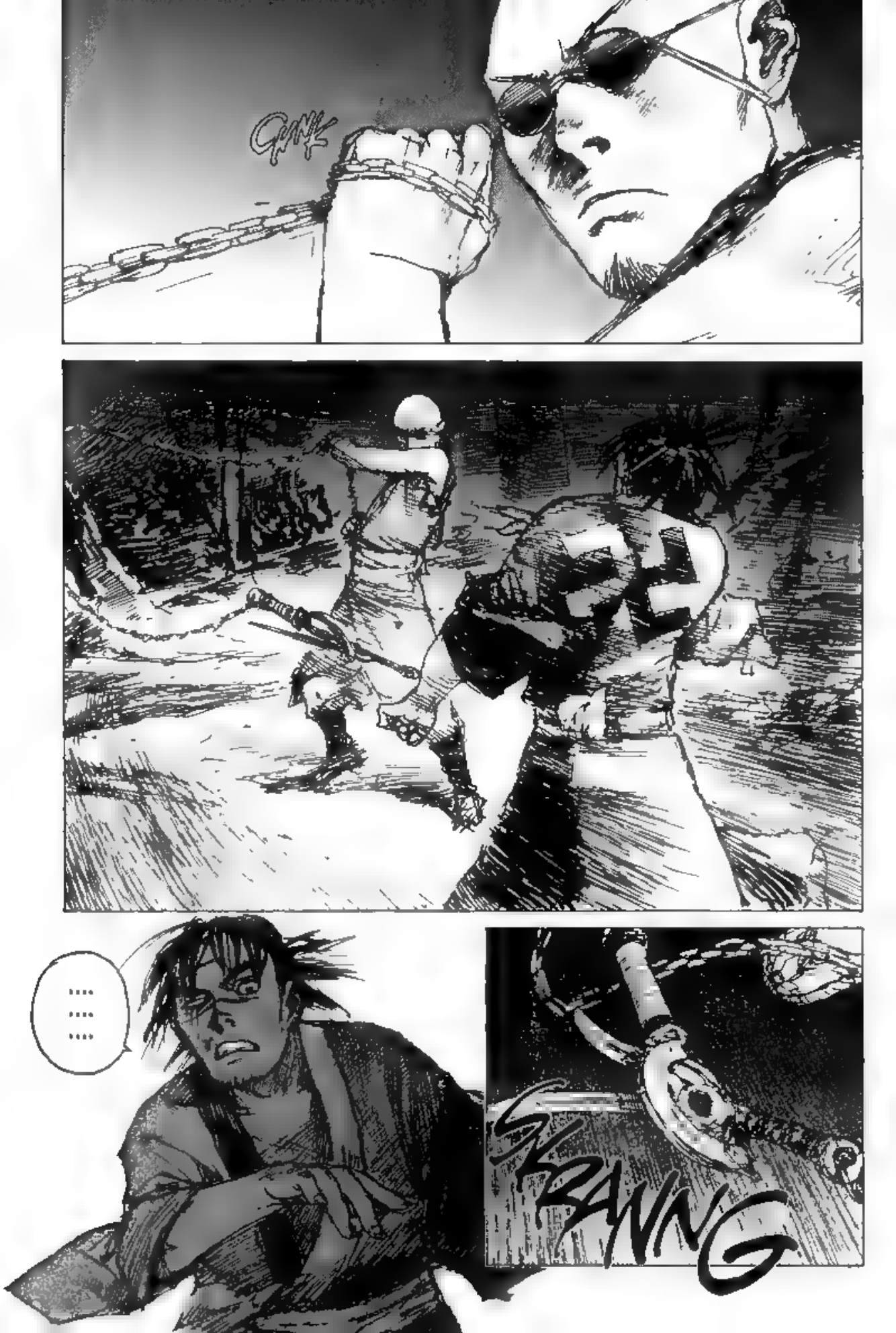
HOW MANY HAVE YOU BAGGED?

.....
.....
FIFTY-NINE.

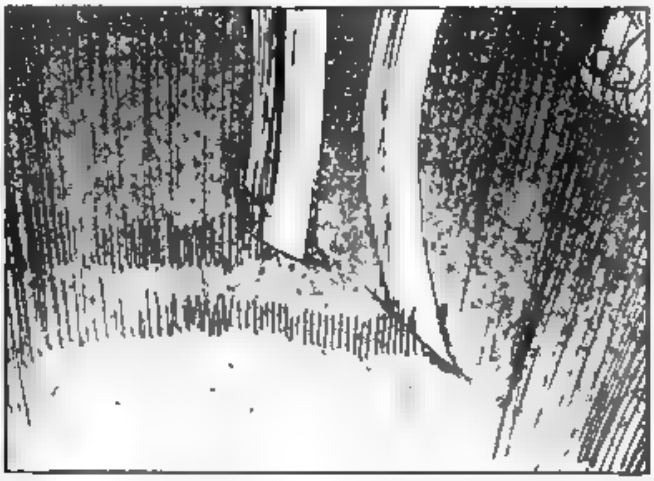
...I LOSE.

I MADE A *PLEDGE* TO NEVER KILL ANYONE *BUT ITTŌ-RYŪ.*
IF I KILL YOU HERE, YOU'RE NUMBER ONE.
LET'S *BEGIN!*


SWING
!


CLINK
....
....
....
SKRANNG

.....
.....



NEXT!
YOU CAN GET ANOTHER ONE FROM YOUR HUT.

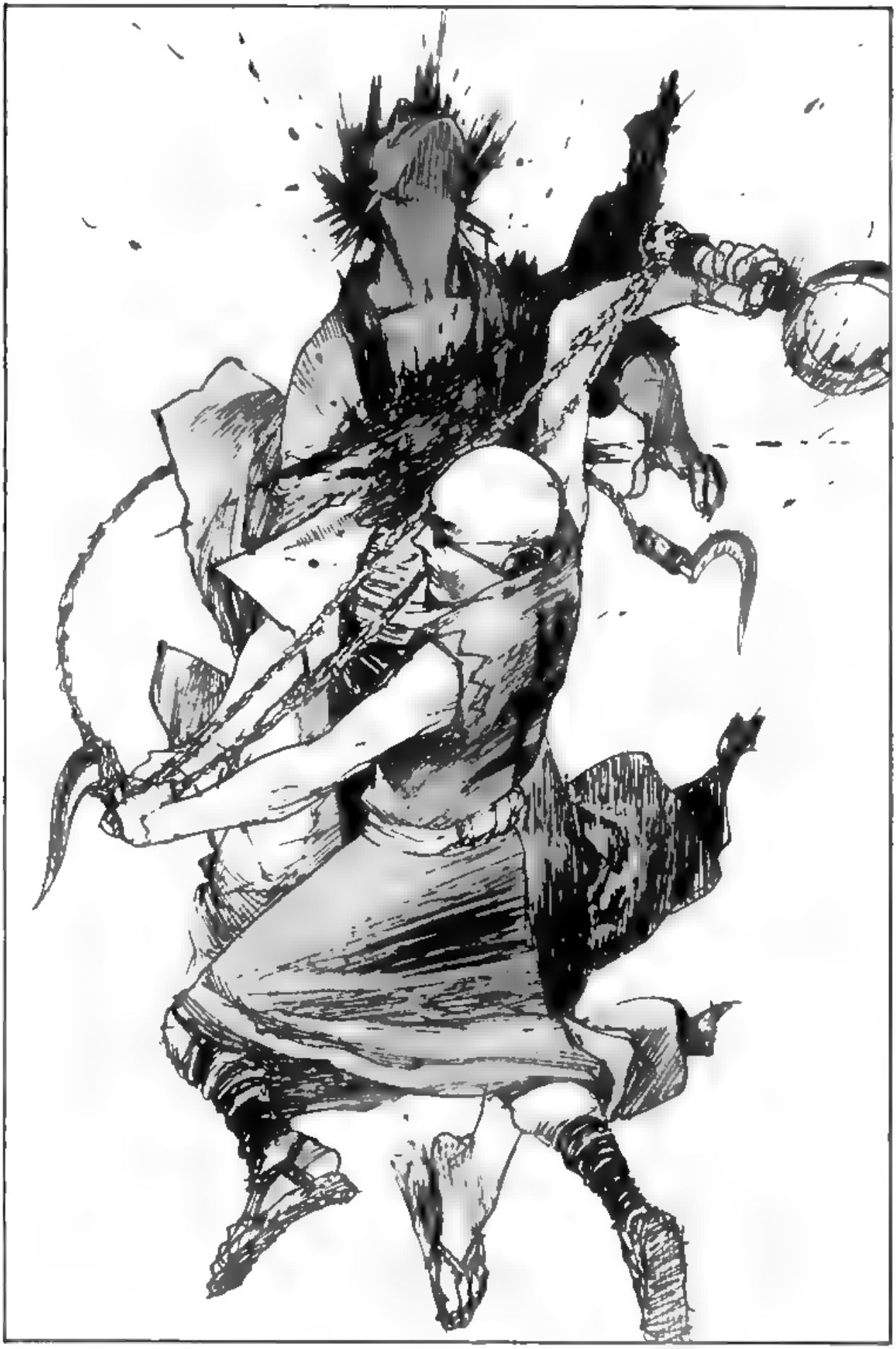
HEH HEH HEH...
GIICHI... THAT'S SOME WEAPON YOU GOT THERE.
BEEN YEARS SINCE I SAW ONE I WANTED.
SORRY, MAN. BUT WHEN I WANT A GUY'S WEAPON...?
THIRTY MINUTES LATER, IT'S RIGHT IN HERE.

MANJI.
IF I TAKE IT IN THE NECK OR HEART, I DIE.
BUT I KNOW YOU'RE BUILT A LITTLE DIFFER-ENTLY.
WHERE IS IT?
WHAT WILL MAKE YOU DIE?
I'LL AIM FOR IT.
ARE YOU CRAZY?!
YOU THINK I'D TELL YOU THAT?!
YOU MIS-UNDERSTAND.
I ASK FOR YOUR SAKE.

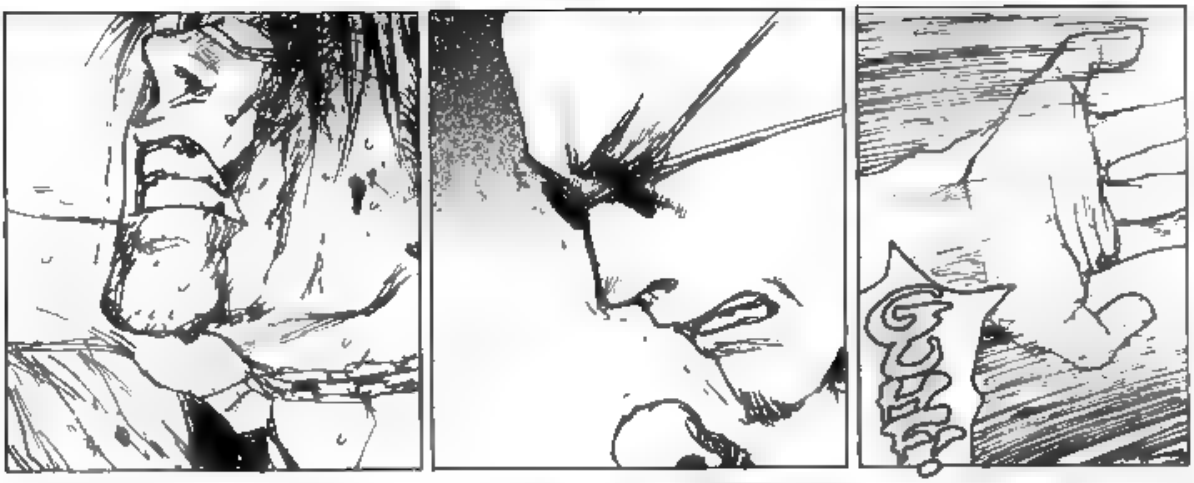
I WON'T LOSE FOR YOU, BUT LET ME SHORTEN YOUR SUFFERING.
OH, HOH... MUCHO THANKS.
VERY THOUGHT-FUL.
IT'S COOL, GIICHI... DON'T WORRY 'BOUT ME.

SLICE 'EM LIKE YOU SEE 'EM! IF YOU CAN!

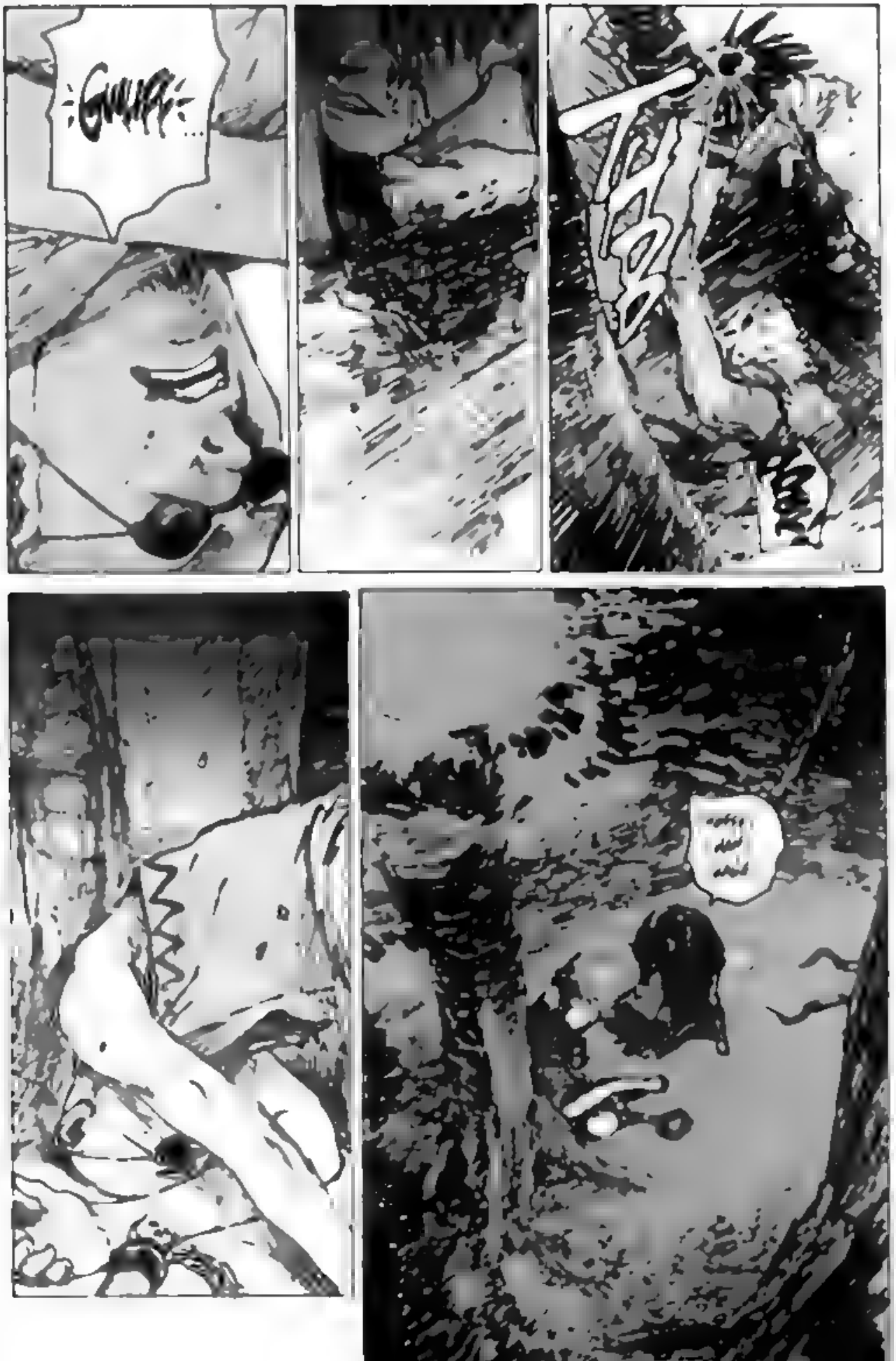
AH...?!
KHRUNG



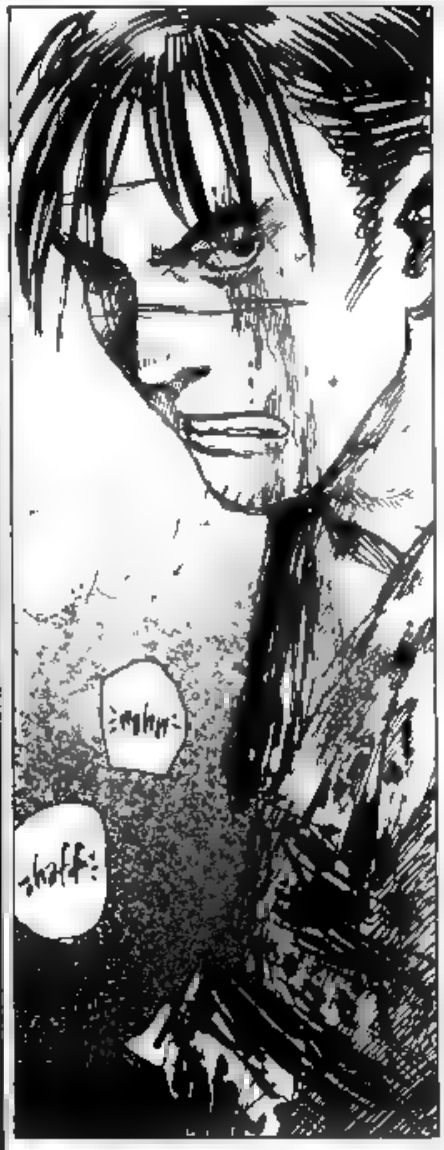
GH!
SPARK


GUF!

!


GWAH...
TAP!

HAWRK!
HWK!
HAFF...
KOFF!
mhh...
mff...
mff...
mhh...
Hee



SHRK
SHRAAK

GOD-
DAMN...

TWILIGHT
Part 3

RRAAAH!

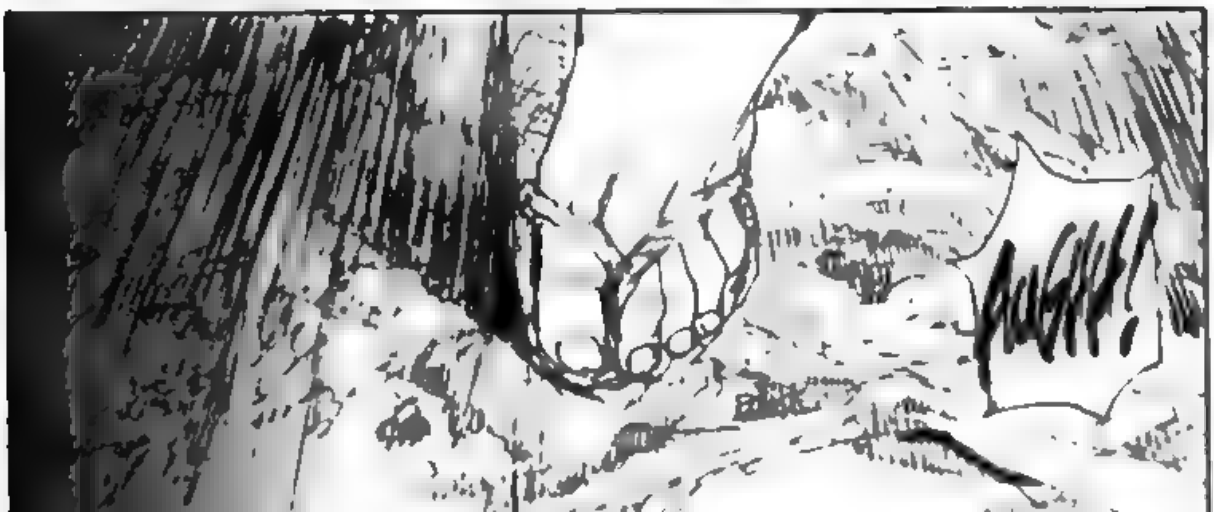
YOU'RE CAUGHT.

FRIGGIN'... HURTS!
I DON'T LIKE LONG FIGHTS...
...AND GETTING HERE TOOK FAR TOO LONG.
I'VE NEVER RELEASED AN ENEMY ALIVE.

MANJI, LISTEN UP.
WASTING YOUR LIFE, PLEDGING YOUR LIFE? IT'S THE SAME.
IF YOU'RE READY TO WASTE IT, THEN WHY NOT OFFER IT... TO THE MUGAI-RYŪ?
COME WITH ME!
I'LL SET YOU FREE.
SET ME FREE? HEY, COME ON...

WOULD THE MUGAI-RYŪ TAKE A WIMP WHO'D AGREED TO THAT?
THIS OUTTA... WORK...
NO CHOICE, THEN...
DIE...

KENK!


AUGH!

GLASS
HAIEEE YAH!

SHIT!

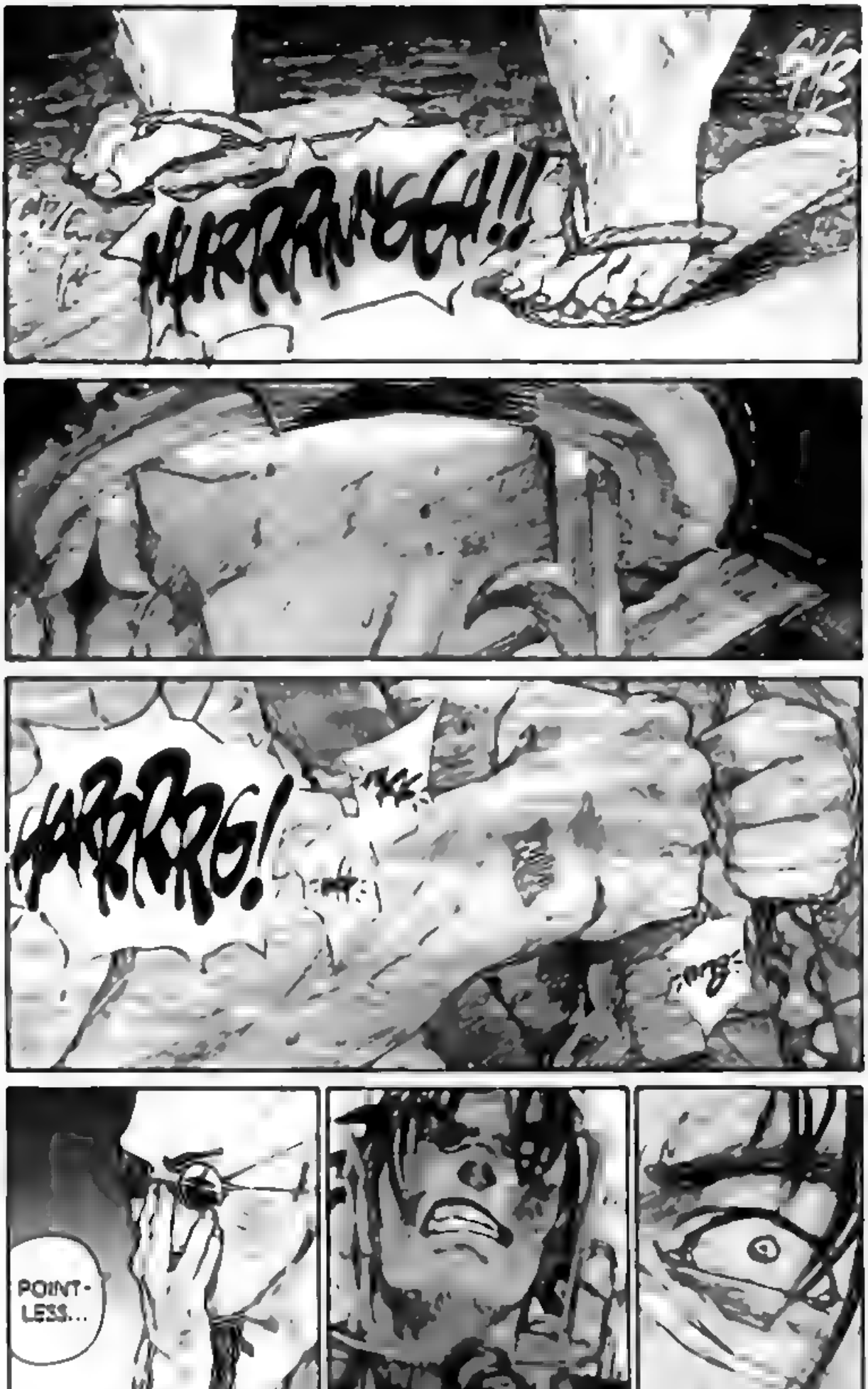
.....
.....!
KRAK!
KRAK!
KRAKKK
NNGGAHH!!!
SKRRRT-TCH

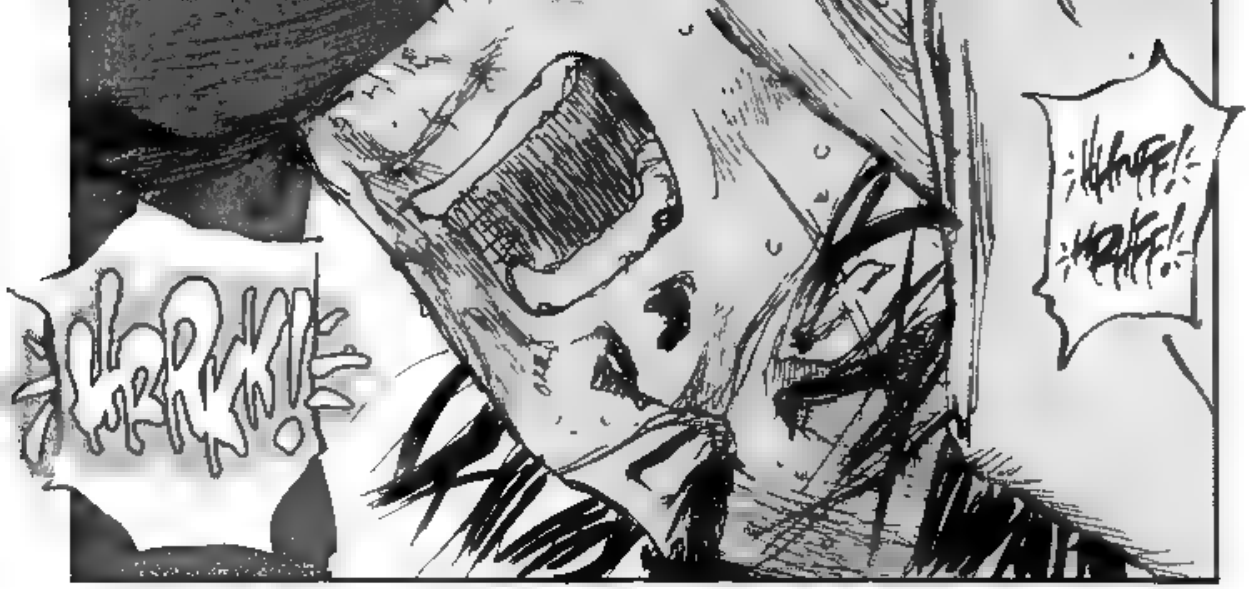
NO FRIGGIN'... JOKE... BLOODY HELL...
JIGAL..
GONG

AH...?!
.....
NYEH...

YOU FINALLY LET GO, BY GOD.
NO PROBLEM. YOU CAN'T REMOVE IT.
THERE'S A TRICK.
AH! IS THERE, NOW?
SHUCKS. LIKE, TOO EFFIN' BAD.
I DIDN'T WANNA SHOW OFF, BUT...

NGN...!
GNNRR...
.....
.....
RRAAAA!!!


HURRRNGH!!
HARRRG!
POINT-
LESS...


HRRK!
HNNF!
HNNF!

GRK!
KOFF
HNNF
HRF!

.....
.....

LOOK AT WHAT YOU'VE DONE...
IT'S... USE-LESS NOW.
SORRY 'BOUT THAT.
YOU CAN HAVE ONE OF MINE OVER THERE.
YOU'D BE DOWN WITH THAT, RIGHT?
WE'RE BOTH ABLE. LET'S GO!
.....
.....
NO...

ANOTHER DAY, PERHAPS.
YOU'VE TIRED ME OUT.
SO, LIKE, IF I BUST YOUR ONLY WEAPON...
...IT MEANS I... WIN?
HMM... SEEMS SO...

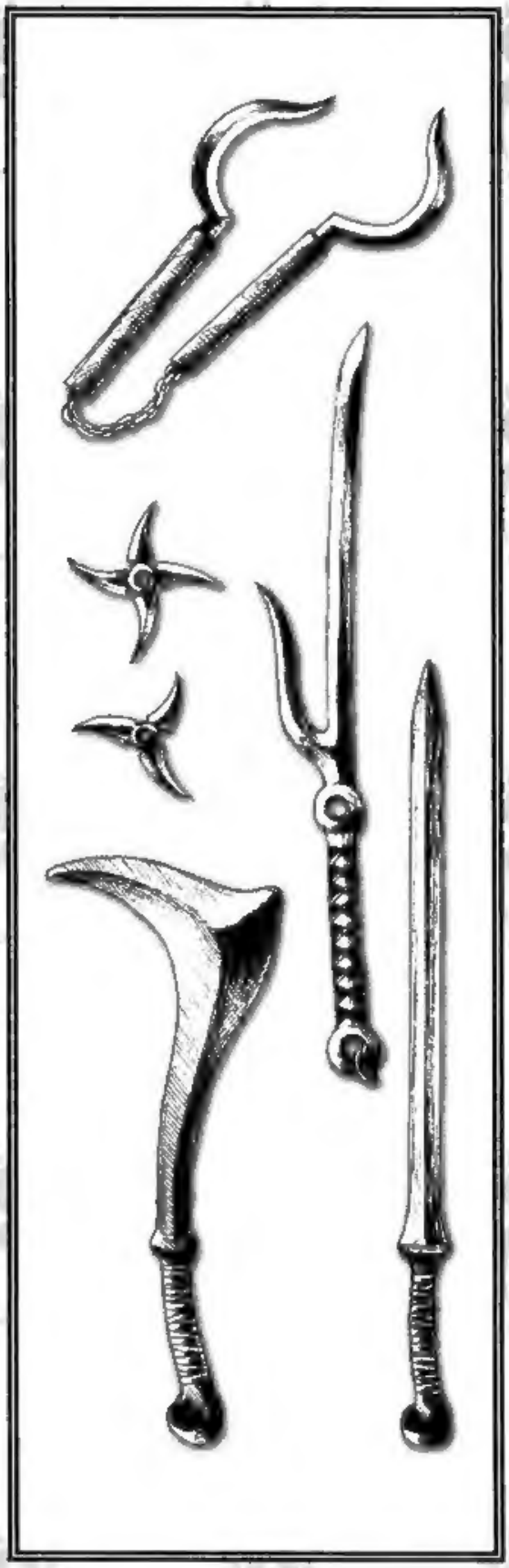
GIICHI!
FINE BY ME! TAKE ME TO YOUR MUGAI-RYŪ BOSSMAN!
DON'T GET ME WRONG. I'M NOT SAYING I'LL JOIN.
I JUST WANNA SEE HIM. THE GUY WHO CAN PUSH YOU AROUND.
YOU'RE INCREDI-BLE... YOU PLANNED IT ALL ALONG?
WASTING ALL THIS BLOOD. DELIBER-ATELY...
HELL...

I WAS
BORED...
NOW I DON'T
NEED TO
BABYSIT...

AH!

TO BE CONTINUED...!

GLOSSARY



bakufu: the central government; the bureaucracy that grew up around the Tokugawa shoguns. Originally established in Edo, today's Tokyo, by the warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu.

bangashira: head of the *banshū*.

banshū: officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself.

dōjō: a hall for martial arts training; here centers for swordsmanship.

dono: a very polite honorific indicating much respect.

Go-Rōjū: senior councilors to the Shogun, picked from the most trusted *daimyō* (feudal lords).

hakama: outer garment worn by samurai, made of leather or heavy cloth and sometimes dyed with distinctive colors and patterns.

han: a feudal domain.

hara-kiri: ritual suicide by disembowelment.

Ittō-ryū: the radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

kenshi: a swordsman (or swordswoman), not necessarily born into the samurai caste; a warrior.

ryō: a gold piece.

ryū: a sword school.

Shingyōtō-ryū: a *dōjō* that celebrated older, harsher traditions of combat training.

tsukiyotake: poisonous mushroom unique to Japan.

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Rin has spent countless days chasing the murderer of her parents, and now she has Anotsu Kagehisa where she wants him, but the deathly ill Anotsu is too weak for the honor-bound Rin to strike down. But such is not the case for the students of the Shingyōtō-*ryū*, who are out to avenge the death of their sword master, and they have Rin captured and Anotsu cornered. The spirit of revenge is thick in the air and about to get thicker as Manji, Rin's immortal bodyguard, finally reunites with his charge as this pot of retribution prepares to boil over. And so Manji is faced with a strange irony — to save Rin, he must cut down the men who are out to kill Anotsu, Manji's sworn enemy!

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